

VOICES IN A ZANZIBARI CULTURE
*Performing Taarab in the Changing
Society of Stone Town*



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My father said I was lazy in school. He used to say, my father: 'I play, but I have job. You can play when you have job! Study!'(....) Now I say: 'Why you want bigger car? You have music!'
(Matona, 40)

Abstract

This thesis examines the contemporary situation of performing *taarab* musicians in Stone Town, Zanzibar. Taarab is the traditional music of Zanzibar, a fusion of Arabic, African, Indian and European influences. It is also a popular music of Zanzibar, constantly developing and evolving with the changing society. Stone Town is affected by the increasing number of tourists, which naturally brings about changes in the musical scene as well as the taarab scene.

Based on a qualitative research design using a semi-structured qualitative interview, this present study aims to describe the circumstances and conditions of performing taarab musicians within Zanzibar Town's centre: Stone Town. The interviews were conducted during fieldwork in Stone Town in January and February 2008. The focus is on taarab instrumentalists, both male and female, with a particular emphasis on female instrumentalists. I explore reasons for the gender differences on the taarab scene and discuss the conflicting values musicians are facing in contemporary Stone Town.

Certain areas of conflict or friction seem to keep reappearing among those concerned with taarab. Traditional patterns of knowledge transmission are changing rapidly with the beat of society. What was considered an incentive to pick up an instrument only a few years ago is today another matter entirely. The growing commercialism and changing society influences taarab musicians towards economical gain. It seems that the development is particularly challenging for female musicians with professional aspirations. Female taarab instrumentalists are scarce within all parts of the taarab scene. From the voiced opinions of my informants I suggest that this is due to a number of factors: the role of Islam in Stone Town society, the significance of tradition, the changing demands of the audiences and employers on the taarab scene and mere practicalities of practicing the profession.

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

The onset of this thesis began several years ago, during my first visit to Zanzibar in January 2004. I had returned from Norway a few months earlier from a stay on Madagascar, where a strong fascination with the African island cultures, their people and their music had emerged. When an opportunity opened to participate in a NORAD¹ funded project in the Tanzanian mainland and the archipelago of Zanzibar, I welcomed the chance to see more of the islands in the Indian Ocean. Our group consisted of the chairman of the NORAD project, a representative from the Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation (NRK) who had spent considerable time in Africa in co-operation with African musicians, an experienced sound technician and pianist, and me. All four had defined fields of responsibility during our stay in Tanzania and in Zanzibar.

For me the trip had a dual purpose. The primary objective was to teach a handful of Zanzibaris to play the cello well enough to make possible continued playing when I left the island. On the plane trip from Amsterdam to Dar es Salaam, we were informed that there was a more urgent reason for my partaking in the project as well; there was hardly anyone left in Zanzibar who could handle the cello. The instrument had traditionally been part of the crew in the local taarab orchestra, but was now on the verge of extinction, the practice of it marginal. The only cello in Zanzibar had recently been shipped from Agder University College² in Kristiansand to the Dhow Countries Music Academy³ in Stone Town.

Secondary, I was going to partake in recording and notating songs and nursery rhymes for a children's songbook. The book was going to be employed in Tanzanian schools. We devoted our time to the songbook project the first half of the trip, and I spent the rest of my time on teaching the cello.

Our group travelled by plane to Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, and we spent our first days travelling about the East African mainland, recording children's songs and nursery rhymes for the songbook. When the group later travelled to the Zanzibari capital Stone Town, or Zanzibar Town, we did so by ferry from the Dar es Salaam harbour. This being a few years ago and out of the mid-summer tourist season, there were few outsiders arriving by sea. It was mid-winter in Europe, and very hot in Africa. I had, as mentioned,

¹The Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation, a directorate under the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), dedicated to contribution in the international cooperation to fight poverty and effective management of Norwegian development funds (www.norad.no).

²Presently University of Agder.

³Henceforth referred to as DCMA.

returned from a stay in Madagascar a few months earlier, and was very happy to be back in what I considered to be 'Africa'. Although my enthusiasm nearly overran my ability to critically appraise my surroundings, I nevertheless soon became aware of great differences in the cultural life, flora and fauna compared to what I had experienced in Madagascar a few months earlier. Directly after the return to Norway in February 2004, I noted the following impressions in my journal:

(...) and was prepared to meet something like [Madagascar]. However, when I arrived in Stone Town a morning in January after some days in Dar es Salaam, I was immediately struck by the unique characteristics and atmosphere of the place. Arriving by ferry from the stuffiness of Dar es Salaam, to me its beauty could not match that of the turquoise Indian Ocean against the more or less (mainly less) well-kept tall buildings situated along the shoreline of the town centre. The beauty was not a glamorous one, nor were the surroundings necessarily aimed at pleasing the Western tourist with regards to the cleanliness of the streets, the efficiency of the officials and the pushiness of the salesmen and porters. The extremely hot air was dense with both pleasant and rather unpleasant smells. The buildings, on closer scrutiny, would some places appear to be on the verge of collapsing, while they in other places were surprisingly well kept. Along the road, certain buildings bore apparent marks of great architecture and – to my eyes – magnificent times. There were hardly any other Western women around and I was happy I had dressed according to customs and could cover my hair with a scarf if necessary.

The unique atmosphere of Stone Town is created by the combination of the city's extraordinary history, which includes being under several different regimes and the fact that it is the world's oldest functioning Swahili city (Briggs, P., 2007). Its 375 000 inhabitants' diversity in cultural heritage also contribute. Although the city has changed a great deal since my first visit in 2004, it has somehow kept its uniqueness in spite of the massive and expanding entrance of tourist activity and all its aspects. It is a well functioning city as regards business, education, expansion, social life and cultural life. The latter is composed by several elements including theatres, pictorial and visual art, dance, craft – and music.

Zanzibar is a place where customs and people have come together to form new constellations – culturally, musically and socially. Consequently, the Zanzibari way of life holds numerous facets as well as certain noteworthy paradoxes. The musical genres are said to be evolving – or dissolving, the answer depending on the respondent's views on the development. The challenges facing women may be very different from the ones encountered by men. The economic landscape is changing, and Stone Town is, as mentioned, literally wide open to visitors. It is argued that the changes in social and economic structures are brought on by the increasing tourism, which is now irreversible. All the changes in society affect the musical scene in Stone Town – and by that, the musicians themselves.

1.1 Background

1.1.1 Historical outline and empirical setting

The archipelago of Zanzibar is situated about 38 km off the coast of Dar es Salaam on the East African mainland.⁴ It consists of two main islands and several small islets. The island of Unguja, commonly named Zanzibar, is the largest with its 1658 km², followed by Pemba and its 802 km². In 1964 the archipelago joined with the Tanganyika of that time to form the United Republic of Tanzania. Although the archipelago of Zanzibar has its own government and president, it is still placed under the sovereignty of mainland Tanzania and its national assembly. The majority of the population on the island is settled in Stone Town⁵, which is situated on the island's western coast. Its inhabitants are descendents of, or are themselves first-generation, mainland Africans and Omani or Yemeni Arabs. In recent years there has also been an onset of immigrants from Pakistan and India. The population is hence diverse both in religion and in cultural traditions and although 97% are Muslim, there are both Hindu temples and Christian churches in the city (Briggs, P., 2007).

The East African coast had been named *Azania* by the Greeks, but it was early known as 'the Land of the Zanj'; the land of the Negroes[sic]. The name Zanzibar is derived from the word Azania which comes from the originally Persian word *Zanj*, and is now adopted by other languages (Hall, 1996:13). The history of the island is a varied and rich one. It saw the arrival of Arabian merchants in Stone Town around 700AD, followed by Indian, Persian and Chinese traders in the centuries to come. The harbour of Stone Town was a favoured destination for Arab and Persian captains sailing to Africa on the winter monsoon (Ibid.).

Zanzibar archipelago has seen several different regimes during the last centuries. At the end of the 15th century, Portuguese navigators established a trade station in Zanzibar while looking for a trade route to India. At the end of the 17th century the Portuguese were ousted from Zanzibar as Omani Arabs turned the archipelago into a main centre for slave traffic. The Omani sultan Seyyid Said bin Sultan⁶ ultimately moved his court from Muscat to Zanzibar in 1840. This was done to avoid an escalation of the beginning conflicts he experienced with his own clan, as well as to seal Zanzibar's

⁴ The following chapter is based on information from McIntyre & McIntyre (2009) and the CIA World Factbook (2008) unless otherwise indicated.

⁵ Stone Town describes the inner centre of Zanzibar's capital, whereas Zanzibar Town includes a larger area (cf. 2.1 *Framing the questions*). In this thesis the capital and cultural centre of Zanzibar is referred to as Stone Town.

⁶ Although the sultan of Zanzibar in the second half of the 19th century is originally entitled al-Sayyid Sa'id, the name is generally 'Europeanised' as Seyyid Said (Hall, 1996). Therefore, I use the latter version in this text.

position as a strategic and commercial power in the Indian Ocean (Middleton, 1992). Its capital Stone Town thus became an Arab state, serving as a centre for trade and politics in the region. Towards the 1900s, Stone Town sustained and further strengthened its commerce.

The archipelago was a British protectorate from 1890, and several British explorers such as Stanley and Livingstone began their expeditions to inner Africa from Zanzibar. The protectorate lasted until 1963, when the sultanate and its government were overthrown and Zanzibar gained its independence. The sovereignty was however short-lived and Abeid Karume became the newly formed republic's first president in the 1964 revolution. Although this form of government still holds, it is highly debated (Askew, 2002).

Over the years, Zanzibar has consisted mainly of four dissimilar groups of people, namely mainland Africans, Arabs, Asians (primarily Indians) and Europeans. The Europeans arrived through mainland Africa with the attempt of colonisation and new trade, whereas the wind brought Indian merchants and merchandise. The greatest influence came, however, with the Arabs. From the Arabian Peninsula, merchants brought goods and spices – and Islam. Extensive trade with merchants of Portuguese, British and Omani descent as well as tradesmen of several other nationalities, has put its distinctive cultural imprint on the islands. Goods and merchandise as well as clothing and vocabulary were affected. The impact of foreign influence is particularly visible in Stone Town. The influence can be discerned in the architecture and culinary traditions in the city as well as its inhabitants. It is also clearly noticeable in the music. But despite the fact that certain elements speak clearly of foreign impact and even domination, the overall impression of the city is unmistakably Zanzibari and *Swahili*.⁷

The indigenous inhabitants on Zanzibar, the *Waswahili*⁸, have varying views of the world's coherence. Religious practices stemming from mainland Bantu beliefs still exist to some extent in the contemporary society and merged with Islam when it began its slow expansion at the beginning of the eighth century (Kearney, 2004; McPherson, 1998). The extensive trade connections between inhabitants on opposite sides of the Indian Ocean also influenced the Zanzibari inhabitants. In particular, the increasing number of Arabic merchants put their mark on accepted practice and etiquette in Stone

⁷ Swahili is both the term for the language spoken in Zanzibar and a description of a way of life in Zanzibar as well as mainland Africa. The word is derived from the Arabic *sawahil*; coast (Middleton, 1992). Stone Town is the centre of the capital of Zanzibar and is the world's oldest functioning Swahili city and has been on UNESCO's World Heritage List since 2000 (Retrieved May 5, 2007 from whc.unesco.org/en/list/173).

⁸ Swahili persons (Binns, 2006:163).

Town (Middleton, 1992). Through the increasing contact between Zanzibaris and merchants both east and north of Zanzibar, the archipelago and the Arabic peninsula gradually grew economically interdependent of each other. The travellers influenced the islands' culture, and as the 20th century commenced the cultural exchange was flourishing (Ibid.).

This cultural exchange especially influenced the musical scene and musical life in Stone Town. Visiting merchants, foreseeing that they would stay away from their homelands for long periods of time, brought along cultural entertainment on their voyages; music from their homelands. Instruments and musicians from the Arabian Peninsula, Egypt, China and Indonesia hence found their way to the archipelago off the coast of Africa. The ships often docked for longer periods of time in one place and the visiting musicians performed during their stay. As a consequence, the inhabitants of Zanzibar were introduced to new instruments and the sharing of musical experiences.

Zanzibari music has become a blend of different genres and social expressions as the years have passed. Bantu practices have combined with Muslim traditions, forming the Zanzibari cultural context.⁹ The cultural interchange throughout the years has given grounds for what is now known as *Zanzibari taarab music* (Kirkegaard, 1996).

The relatively short geographical distance from Stone Town to the African mainland contributes to ample ferry and plane traffic between Dar es Salaam, Nairobi and Stone Town. Stone Town is thus the cultural centre of Zanzibar, the home of the largest taarab orchestra and the venue for most of the island's concerts and the home of both international festivals. The number of tourists in Zanzibar has skyrocketed in the last couple of decades. In the years between 1985 and 2006, the number of international arrivals in Zanzibar Airport multiplied by seven (Madsen, D., 2007:35). The travellers have provided a breeding ground for extensive foreign influence on Stone Town's musical and cultural life, giving grounds for great changes in the everyday life of the Zanzibari inhabitants.

1.1.2 On taarab

The taarab music of Zanzibar is the island's traditional as well as popular music and its capital Stone Town the cultural, administrative and economical centre. Since the mid 1900s, taarab music has been the most widely played musical style. It is rooted in African (mainly Eastern African), Arabic, European and Indian music and its appeal is

⁹ See Middleton, 1992; Parkin, 1994.

accordingly broad in Stone Town's diverse population. Taarab is also widespread in different forms in parts of the African mainland, particularly in Kenya and Tanzania.¹⁰ With the exception of the countries' capitals, the music is most well-known in coastal areas. Topp (1992) divides taarab music into three segments or styles, namely the drum-based *kidumbak*, *taarab ya wanawake* (women's taarab) and *ideal taarab*.¹¹ Despite the gained currency of taarab the perhaps most traditional form (labelled *ideal taarab*) primarily exists on Zanzibar. *Taarab ya wanawake* does not exist in the contemporary society, at least not in its originally organised forms. The women's taarab groups dismantled in the middle of the last century, following political regime changes as well as musical changes. *Kidumbak* is still an important part of the Zanzibari and mainland Tanzanian cultural and musical expression.¹² In their papers, Topp Fargion (1999; 2000) and Khamis (2002; 2004a; 2004b) also discuss the development and characteristics of the musical genre *modern taarab*. In this style, known taarab songs are remixed and given new lyrics. The use of the synthesizer is central, as well as the use of heavy live or synthesized drumbeats to facilitate dancing for the audience. The lyrics are known to be harsher and more direct than the traditional poetry in the *ideal taarab*.

The style mentioned as *ideal taarab* is discussed in this text. It is still widely played and performed in contemporary Stone Town, although changing and evolving with the developing musical market. As the musicians are adapting to the demand of the hotels and restaurants, the general size of the performing orchestra is diminishing. The Zanzibari singer Siti binti Saad, often dubbed the 'mother of taarab', is described by Topp Fargion (2000:3) in the following way:

(...) a singer of African descent from rural Zanzibar. In the 1930s continuing to her death in 1950, she rose to stardom throughout the coast, singing on the one hand for the Sultan and his upper-class guests, while also popularising[sic.] the style among the ordinary Swahili-speaking community. She started the Swahili-isation process by becoming the first person to sing in Swahili, and by tackling themes from their everyday lives in her songs.

The word *taarab* itself derives from the Swahili word *tariba*, which means to be moved with both joy and grief – or to be overjoyed; to be “transported with joy” (Ibid.:41). It is not, as one might think, from the word *Arab*. The music is traditionally performed by a large orchestra and choir; the number of people onstage is often as high as 30. The traditional orchestra consists of the instruments *oud* (also spelled ‘*ūd*), the trapezoid

¹⁰ See Ntarangwi, 2003; Askew, 2002.

¹¹ I will not elaborate on the role of Islamic musical culture / Sufi in taarab (cf. Kirkegaard, 2007) in this thesis.

¹² For history and descriptions of *taarab ya wanawake* and *kidumbak*, see Topp (1992) and Kirkegaard (1996). For descriptions of *kidumbak* as well as other traditional music and dance styles, see DCMA's www.zanzibarmusic.org and www.zanzibar.net.

zither *qanun* (also spelt *ganun* and *qānūn*), *nay* flute, accordion, violins, double bass, cello, numerous traditional drums such as *batak*, *dumbak* and Zanzibari *tabla* and a vocal soloist as well as the choir.¹³ The contemporary orchestra often make use of the synthesizer as well. When listening to taarab music for the first time, the Arabic and Egyptian influence is noticeable, as well as the influence from the African mainland and the Bantu traditions (Kirkegaard, 1996). Concerts have traditionally had the function of being as much a social gathering as a musical one. They are traditionally an opportunity to meet and to socialize, to dress up – and to listen to songs with lyrics that may very well apply to the everyday life of the audience.¹⁴

There are two main taarab orchestra in Stone Town, the oldest more than a 100 years old. During a regular year, there are frequent performances in several different locations, especially in restaurants and hotels all over the island. The performance frequency is intensified during the two great festivals in the city every year, as well as in the tourist season.¹⁵ Since Zanzibar opened to tourists there has been a rearrangement in the musical market towards professionalizing the taarab performances and the frequent performing of smaller groups in e.g. hotels. Several record producers from Western countries are recording the taarab music; *Ace Records* was the first in 1988, returning twenty years later to document the contemporary taarab music.¹⁶

1.2 The relevance of the study

A lot of the research conducted on taarab is relatively new. In recent years, scholarly interest in the archipelago of Zanzibar has flourished and studies have been published within fields such as anthropology, sociology, ethnomusicology, development and education, as well as information technology, pedagogy and history. Research conducted on the contemporary musical realities of Stone Town is however rare. An ethnography is about the dialogue of sensibilities implicated in encountering and depicting people and a place – a report of unique experience, Steven Feld (1990:x) writes in the preface to *Sound and Sentiment*. Being the first *female* teacher on a taarab instrument in the first music academy on the islands, I have had access to parts of the male musical community. In this study, I explore parts of the contemporary musical situation in Stone Town, focussing four voices in the Zanzibari society.

¹³ For descriptions and illustrations of instruments, see e.g. Topp (1992), Graebner (2004) and Madsen, D., (2007).

¹⁴ Cf. 6.3 *Participating on the contemporary musical scene*.

¹⁵ *Sauti za Busara* (Sounds of Wisdom) music festival takes place in February and Zanzibar International Film Festival takes place in July.

¹⁶ R. Armstrong, personal communication, January 14, 2009.

Travelling as a single woman and establishing the authority as a teacher never posed any major problems. I had been conscious of the challenge of teaching both male and female musicians in a Muslim community and was wondering whether the men would be able and willing to accept the instructions I gave during lessons.¹⁷ As it turned out, the teaching was uncomplicated. This may be due the fact that I was careful to dress according to customs and respect Zanzibari practises to the best of my ability. I also took care to treat the students with respect and regularly enquired (as to) whether they were comfortable with the way I taught. On my return to Stone Town in the spring of 2008, I nevertheless wondered whether the fact that I was now travelling with my husband would influence the way I was treated by the Zanzibari men and in particular if it would influence their perception of me as a teacher and musician. In the patriarchal society of Stone Town, women have traditionally assumed the role of caretaker and head of the household rather than e.g. teaching positions. It soon became evident that my husband's presence had little, if any, effect on my social or musical standing. The authority of 'teacher' was more important to my fellow musicians than that of 'wife'. Although I had always been an outsider in the male dominated musical community, my recognised knowledge of the cello, gave me straightforward access to the male musical scene. Access was not as easy, it seemed, for the Zanzibari women with professional aspirations. I was intrigued by the discrepancies in the stories told by Zanzibari women compared those told by men with connections to the musical scene.

1.3 Overview of the thesis

This thesis is organised into six main parts: 1.0) Introduction, 2.0) Research focus, 3.0) Theoretical background, 4.0) Methodology, 5.0) Empirical data and analysis, and 6.0) Discussion.

Chapter 1.0 presents background knowledge of Zanzibar, an introduction to taarab music and the relevance of the study. I have written a short outline of the history of taarab music and an introduction to the musical style of taarab. Contextual information of taarab music and its surroundings is vital to understanding the frame of reference in which the informants find themselves. Chapter 2.0 presents the research focus of the text, moving from a description of the design of the study towards the research questions and aims of the study. The key questions are framed by a clarification of terms employed in the text as well as briefly relating the study to previous research. A more complete

¹⁷ Young women travelling without children or close relatives are more prone to be an object of pity than an authority a in a patriarchal society such as Stone Town, as Lutz (1998) discusses.

overview of key literature is however given in chapter 3.0 of the study, where the text includes a review of relevant empirical research and theoretical concepts as well as some thoughts on how these concepts make a mark on my research.

Chapter 4.0 presents the methodological framework for the gathering and processing of the empirical data. This includes critical comments on the methodology and an evaluation of the project as well as a description of how the data was processed and the categories created. In the fourth chapter I also present the informants, whose voiced statements and opinions form the core of this study.

Chapter 5.0 aims to provide an overview of the statements and viewpoints provided by the informants. I have sorted and merged the informants' statements and quotes into five categories with different sub-categories, which have been created on the basis of the empirical findings. Some small personal comments and a few references to literature in this section provide for a contextualisation, when I have found it especially clarifying.

However, the empirical findings themselves are discussed and summarized into main headings to elaborate on the key research questions in chapter 6.0 of the thesis: the discussion. The discussion is organized with three main headings and five sub-headings, and the empirical data are more fully related to theoretical concepts and previous research. Throughout the discussion, key issues from previous research inform the text and my own assertions and field notes comment on the research questions.

2.0 RESEARCH FOCUS

2.1 Framing the questions

The design of this study is a qualitatively oriented one. During my inquiries, I employed the method of the qualitative research interview. The research materials itself thus consists of selected and transcribed interviews. Additional information is derived from field notes – both log books and reflexive notes – from four prior trips to Zanzibar.

The thesis deals solely with the circumstances and conditions of musicians within Zanzibar Town's centre: Stone Town. The term 'Stone Town' is therefore employed to illustrate the centre of Zanzibar Town or Zanzibar City.¹⁸ The cultural scene of the capital is centred in Stone Town and most of the venues and orchestra are situated within

¹⁸ The latter also includes areas outside the centre itself, e.g. *Ng'ambo* (literally: the other side), where the majority of Zanzibar Town's inhabitants live (cf. 1.1.1 *Historical outline and empirical setting*).

its borders. I therefore use the term Stone Town to illustrate the area within which the main contemporary musical scene exists. In addition to the Stone Town area, musical events take place on sites close to, or inside, hotels. Some of these venues are located within Zanzibar Town but not within central Stone Town. In these cases, the performing activity is described as out of town.

For aspiring and practising musicians outside the capital, the access to musical training and life conditions in general may be quite different than inside Stone Town. Dhow Countries Music Academy (DCMA) has opened a branch outside the city and has close ties to music on Pemba Island.¹⁹ When DCMA is mentioned in this study, the branch of the academy referred to is the academy's main offices in the Old Custom's House in Stone Town. Moreover, any mention and spelling of taarab instruments are based on the practises of Stone Town.

Taarab is a widespread phenomenon and sources in Cairo, Oman, Mombassa, Nairobi and Dodoma may all claim to hold the original or most authentic form of the music. This thesis deals with taarab as it is and has been known in Stone Town, seen through the eyes of contemporary and earlier musicians as well as the scholars referred to.²⁰ In some cases, certain instruments (e.g. *tabla* drums) share the name of different instruments within other musical traditions or in other languages. Consequently, this text uses the terms employed in contemporary Stone Town as labels for instruments that may bear other names elsewhere. As mentioned in the outline of taarab as a musical style (in 1.1.2 above), the taarab dealt with in this study is the style named by Topp (1992) as *ideal taarab*. This text is limited to the discussion of certain aspects of the performance of ideal taarab only, and other musical styles mentioned will not be discussed.²¹

During several of the visits to Stone Town, I was either living with a Zanzibari middle class family and/or alone in an apartment in the centre of Stone Town. The host family made me a member of the women's community through the daughters and the mother of the house. Through them I was fortunate enough to participate in parts of the less visible world from which the women's community emanate. I have also been the only female teacher at DCMA who gave lessons on a taarab instrument and often the only female musician in any taarab groups I have participated in. These circumstances have helped both form and inform the research questions.

¹⁹ www.zanzibarmusic.org

²⁰ The varying forms of taarab are discussed, either separately or in one, in Gunderson and Bartz, 2000; Khamis, 2004a; 2004b; Racy, 2003; Palmberg and Kirkegaard, 2002; and also Adam, 2008.

²¹ For information on other styles, see e.g. www.zanzibarmusic.org and zanzibar.net/zanzibar/music_and_culture.

During the 2008 fieldwork I was in touch with DCMA, as well as taarab groups and orchestra central to the contemporary musical scene. My educational process has also benefited from participation in concerts of different character and spending time with musicians with varying perspectives.

The research questions in this text are centred on *instrumentalists*, both male and female. However, a particular focus is put on female instrumentalists. Female vocalists, of whom there are several, are not discussed in this work, although the topic is an interesting one. The research questions have been created as a result of the four informants' statements and narratives. The different topics are unevenly emphasized in both the empirical data (6.0) and the discussion (7.0), as a result of the informants' varying emphasis of the different topics.

2.2 Research subject and questions

While working as a teacher and musician in the Zanzibari context, I noticed that areas of conflict or friction kept reappearing in the daily life of the academy as well as in Stone Town society. During the cello lessons it became apparent that knowledge is transmitted differently within different cultures. I grew up in a European context and was offered Western classical training on the cello. The training string players at DCMA have grown up in a different musical context. Whereas Western students generally practise scales in major and minor on the instruments, Zanzibaris have traditionally practised the *maqāmāt*.²² As DCMA and tourism continue to influence Stone Town, however, the Western scale systems are becoming more known and more widely used.²³ In the classes offered at DCMA, they are currently using Western sheet music, classical music and popular music alike. Thus, with the entrance of the Internet, the growing tourism and the growing influence of Western ways of life on several levels of society, the traditional patterns of learning and teaching the musical instruments are changing rapidly. Moreover, what was considered an obstacle or an incentive to pick up an instrument only a few years ago may have changed dramatically, and the premises for picking up an instrument might be altered in the contemporary Zanzibari society.

The circumstances for aspiring musicians in the contemporary society are not necessarily the same as one or two decades ago. The questions of getting access to

²² See theory chapter (3.0) for information on the Arabic scale system of the melodic modes.

²³ The implications of the increased employment of Western scale systems are not easy to foresee. However, sources at DCMA (anonymous, cf. 4.6.2) express concern that the growing Western influences will take too much control. They state the reason for the concern is that Western teachers do not know *maqām*. Moreover, several Zanzibari teachers are unwilling to employ it in their teaching as they are "more fascinated" by the minor and major scales.

musical training, as well as completing musical training once access has been achieved, are areas of the musical development that are subject to the changes and developments within the Zanzibari society. In the changing Stone Town, the ability and chances to survive as a professional musician is also a recurring topic.

The taarab music of Zanzibar is perhaps one of the most significant aspects of the cultural scenery in Stone Town and Zanzibar as a whole. It has long traditions and significance in both every-day life and important rituals, such as births and weddings (Kirkegaard, 1996). Also, it is an important cultural expression for the Zanzibari people. Traditionally, children and adults, men and women alike, have listened to taarab music and both men and women have performed the music (Racy, 2003). The female pioneer of the Swahili taarab, Siti binti Saad, had power to indirectly influence politics through the critique voiced in her song lyrics. She was accompanied by male musicians, but wrote the majority of her own lyrics (Fair, 2001). Her work as a singer, composer and artist is said to have influenced the current taarab icon, Bi Kidude.²⁴ Moreover, in the 1950s and 1960s there was a blossoming milieu in Stone Town between the all-women groups. Orchestra or groups such as Royal Navy and Royal Air Force, were competing for the audience's attention on a daily basis. The competing aspect of the performances mainly came to life through the lyrical stanzas and caused public debate.²⁵

The contemporary situation, on the other hand, is a different one. Whereas women in the *taarab ya wanawake* of the 1960s were in control of their women's groups, the women in taarab today have generally little influence on the politics of the group. A few are performing as soloists, whereas most of the women are singing in unison in the choirs. In contemporary Stone Town, female musicians playing in taarab orchestra are scarce. It is interesting to observe that the market for taarab performances changes with altering demands from the audience. Moreover, women who wish to participate on the contemporary taarab scene are in a peculiar situation. In a society where it is considered etiquette for women to cover up while in public places, the taarab gatherings are traditionally considered private occasions (Kirkegaard, 1996; Topp, 1992). Hence, neither the women performing on stage, nor the women in the audience are required to

²⁴ The film *As old as my tongue. The myth and life of Bi Kidude* (Jones and Mahmoud, 2007) and the article *Bi Kidude – a living legend* (Gale Reference Team, 2006) offer biographical descriptions of Bi Kidude. Whether or not the icon is a ideal taarab singer is not discussed in the film, although it may be argued that her singing and drumming style resembles the traditional *kidumbak* more than ideal taarab. Several musicians in ideal taarab in contemporary Stone Town (anonymous, cf. 4.6.2) have voiced this opinion. The question will not be discussed in this thesis.

²⁵ It is interesting to note that this musical turn taking took place within the framework of a hierarchical Muslim community (Fair, 2001; Kirkegaard, 1996).

wear the headscarf *buibui*.²⁶ In a culture where it is uncustomary for women to seek public exposure, performing in such a manner is a dilemma. When performing, a musician or singer is not only likely to be looked at but actively seeking to capture an audience. In this text I explore reasons for the gender differences within the orchestra and discuss the conflicting values educating and performing women might be facing. In a Muslim hierarchal culture like the Zanzibari, women have a particular place. Whereas women were essential participants in the early taarab music – the pioneer of the Swahili taarab was female – the women's taarab groups have ceased to exist (Racy, 2003). The groups playing in tourist related locations nowadays mostly consist of men, and, if any at all, only one or two women.

This text investigates the following question:

What is the situation for performing taarab musicians in Stone Town today?

The main question is explored by the following sub-questions:

- 1) What circumstances do young musicians face when they want to take up taarab music as a profession?*
- 2) What, if any, challenges do young women encounter in both taking up an instrument and staying on the taarab scene?*
- 3) How is musical knowledge about taarab transmitted?*
- 4) What factors influence the performing of already trained taarab musicians in their practicing of the musical profession?*
- 5) What changes have taken place for performing taarab musicians within the changing society of Stone Town?*
- 6) What conflicts are there on the taarab scene, and what processes are under way in contemporary musical Stone Town?*

The informants' statements and views are presented in chapter 5.0 and sorted into five categories to draw a picture of the empirical field. The empirical data as a whole are discussed and remerged into three main headings in the last part of this text (6.0). In the discussion, the informants' individual voices are linked to those of researchers who have published literature on the subject. The data and literature are also linked together with my own voice, presenting the additional data based on my field notes. The notes consist of a logbook and diary entries I compiled on my trips to Stone Town.

²⁶ It should be mentioned that although this is a true statement as regards traditional practice, there are indications that it is changing: In 2009, the majority of women performing onstage, be it in a hotel or on a larger stage, wear the *buibui* headscarf.

The literature review (3.0) considers relevant literature that can help shedding light on the research questions. The areas emphasised include the field of ethnomusicology, the history of Stone Town, women in taarab, the history of taarab music and literature on the musical style itself. Literature describing or debating changes that have taken place in taarab is also given attention. The history of both Stone Town and the musical style of taarab are emphasized in order to give background information for the discussion. Historical information also provides the backdrop for the informants' views and statements discussed in chapters 5.0 and 6.0.

3.0 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

This chapter gives an account of relevant literature. The literature is studied in order to get a “thick description” (Geertz, 1973) of the empirical material and bring it together with my own reflections in the discussion. The theoretical framework includes research literature within the fields of ethnomusicology, anthropology and sociology. In addition, methodological research literature includes texts written within the psychological frame of reference. In a study like this, different research fields are of interest; key literature provides a backdrop for the research questions of the text (cf. 2.2 *Research subject and questions*). Written material on the history the Indian Ocean and the archipelago of Zanzibar is interesting when trying to create a picture of the context of taarab music. Literature on taarab music itself, its history and its performers as well as change happening on the taarab scene and on women and taarab is also highly important.

Theory in *ethnomusicology*, Stone (2008) writes, has historically served two masters. On the one hand, the anthropological influences on the discipline have contributed to and emphasized the importance of theory and its place in studies such as the present thesis. Scholars within this discipline have argued for thorough theoretical orientations of projects on all levels on a research study. On the other hand, ethnomusicologists have also traditionally been subject to certain musicological influences, where music has been considered a phenomenon that exists most importantly as something aesthetic and as a creative process. Scholars from this tradition usually support the idea of avoiding theory in order to begin a fieldwork with a blank slate. Stone (Ibid.) claims that although most ethnomusicologists would acknowledge the importance of a theoretical framework, few would also argue for an extended explication of theory. The tacit compromise between the two schools, she concludes, is that theory within ethnomusicology invariably is mentioned and identified. She points out, however, that

there are few studies which detail the involvement of theory in an explicit and extended way. In this study, the empirical material constitutes the core of the study; the informants' voices encountering applicable theory. I have aimed to form the empirical data into categories in an unbiased way to lay the groundwork for conversations between previous research and the voices of the informants. I am aware that my voice and pre-understanding, when creating the analysis and through the created results, might be theory laden. However, I account for my position as a researcher through methodological contemplations and through accounting for the context and theoretical and methodological considerations, which together constitute my understanding while addressing this issue. Historically, there has been what Impey (2006:404) describes as "an uncomfortable relationship" between applied and theoretical fields. In line with Impey's followed arguments, I understand the question of applied ethnomusicology as an integrated theoretical and practical field where practices and empirical data interact with theoretical concepts, forming the questions and key issues.

Myers writes in *Ethnomusicology: An Introduction* (1992) that the qualitative interview is a hallmark of anthropology, sociology and ethnomusicology. The style and form, objective and procedure might vary, but all three research fields share the method of qualitative research interviewing. Sociologists and anthropologists have long traditions of fieldwork; the researcher resides in the milieu for longer periods of time. In recent decades, such a procedure has also become the habit of ethnomusicologists. Several researchers within the discipline have formerly been criticised for what Myers refers to as 'armchair research', where the researcher would sit in his or her office and collect material without any first-hand contact with the culture in question. This tradition has, however, been replaced with a clear demand of self-conducted fieldwork by the researcher (Ibid.). The rationale behind choosing fieldwork and the qualitative interview as the research methods for this thesis are in line with the newer generations of ethnomusicologists; very little armchair research. As argued by the anthropologist Ruth Benedict, anthropology (and ethnomusicology) is "the healthiest of all scepticisms" (Babcock, 1995:105), and fieldwork and the qualitative interview are effective means of putting the healthy scepticism into practice.

The theoretical core of this study is the literature on performing taarab music, including Topp (1992), Kirkegaard (1996) and Racy (2003). New scholars in ethnomusicology are introduced to the idea that a piece of music can have different meanings and even content, depending on the context or situation. This conceptual

understanding implies that the music may be included in cultural activities and be a part of the culture as a whole, yet still emerge as a separate expression in itself. To me taarab is the epitome of such music; its context determining the effects of a given song as well as how the music is understood. Thus, it may leave the imprint of a culture, all the while being valuable performed music (Bohlman, 2002).

The word ‘taarab’ is an example of the duplicity in music where performed pieces with aesthetic value also can be understood within a contextual framework. Racy (2003), dealing with the cultural codex and unspoken practices of taarab seen from an Arabic point of view, writes that the etymological root of the word stems from the Arabic *tariba*, translated “restless” or “agitated”²⁷ or from the root *trb* or *tarabun* meaning “joy, pleasure, delight, rapture, amusement, entertainment, music” (Askew, 2002:102). The term ‘taarab’ has been used since the 20th century, and traditionally refers to an old Arabic repertoire, rooted in the pre World War I musical practice of Egypt and the East-Mediterranean Arab world. The term is directly linked to musical evocation and thus also describes “the musical aspect *per se*” (Racy, 2003:6): “to feel enjoyment”, “to be moved”; an elevated state of mind.²⁸

The Arabic tonal system *maqām* (Arabic: مقام, pl. *maqāmāt*) is used in taarab and consists of melodic modes, covering both the ranking of pitches and the melodic patterns of a given mode.²⁹ The tonal system is used in taarab, although many taarab songs, traditionally referred to in *maqāmāt*, are now referred to in major or minor keys as well (Kirkegaard, 1996; Topp, 1992). *Maqām* is also referred to as an improvisational technique defining the pitch, the patterns and the progression in a musical piece unique for Arabic classical music. It has its equivalents in the Turkish makam, Hungarian meqam, Kurdish muqam, eqos in Byzantine music and raga in Indian music.³⁰

In her dissertation, Kirkegaard (1996) argues how the tendency towards systematized musical production in Tanzania faces musicians to deal actively with the reciprocal interaction of market related forces and collective and individual aesthetical and social choices. This is in line with the contemporary situation in Stone Town, where musicians feel increasingly pressured by the demands presented in the changing society. Kirkegaard (Ibid.) interviewed Seif Salim Saleh, one of Zanzibar’s central taarab musicians at that time and an advocate of ideal taarab. Saleh claims that Zanzibar’s third

²⁷ Retrieved April 5, 2007 from www.kubatana.net.

²⁸ Racy, 2003:6; B. Irshed, personal communication, January 15, 2008.

²⁹ The direct translation of the word is place, and other common spellings are *maqam*, *maqam* or *maqám* (Racy, 2003; Latham, 2002).

³⁰ Retrieved November 26, 2006 from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arabic_maqam.

sultan, Seyyid Bargash bin Said, contributed greatly to the existence of taarab in Stone Town. According to Saleh, the sultan had developed a taste for art and music on his many voyages to India, England and North Africa. He brought back an Egyptian taarab ensemble back to Stone Town from one of his travels and introduced the musical style to his court. Thus, taarab was initially only performed at the Sultan's court. As the court had every sign of excessive luxury, taarab – or *taarabu* in *Kiswahili*³¹ everyday speech – was the music of the upper classes, sung in Arabic (Ibid.; Racy 2003). In this thesis I discuss how taarab has changed in many ways since the time of the Omani sultan.

Kirkegaard (1996:133) argues that vocal music traditionally has been valued higher than instrumental music in the Muslim musical tradition. According to Benestad (1996:15ff) this was also the case in early Christian church music. Religious 'chanting' or incantations of the Qur'an (Arabic: القرآن) outranks other musical activities; as opposed to many other musical contexts they are *halāl* (legitimate) and not *harām* (forbidden). Traditionally, the restrictions surrounding music as art form have been seen as a precautionary measure from Muslim leaders to avoid widespread assimilation with other cultures and keep the Muslim music as "pure" as possible (al Faruqi, 1985). Racy (2003:26) points out that a traditional path towards vocal proficiency has been through Qur'anic chanting; *tajwīd* (Arabic: تجويد), a "melodically elaborate recitation" of the Qur'an. Through *tajwīd*, the singer would learn to i.a. master the different *maqāmāt* and cultivating improvisatory skills, both of which are taught to contemporary young taarab performers.³² The religious landscape in Stone Town is changing, and the musical scene changes with it. In this thesis I describe and discuss some effects of the recent change in society and the ramifications for the music.

For centuries the most common way of acquiring musical skills, knowledge and values has been through serving as an apprentice. This is true of all continents. From the 20th century, the model of apprenticeship has generally been replaced with more curriculum-based instruction. Nevertheless, in the last two decades both philosophical analyses and anthropological studies have taken new interest in the master-apprentice model (Nielsen & Kvale, 1999). *Apprenticeship* is defined as "education within an art form", which "describes the relationship between a master and an apprentice and its conditions and permanence" (Ibid.:18, my translation). Nielsen and Kvale (Ibid.:19) describe four main features of the learning method. (1) *Participation in a practice*

³¹ *Kiswahili* is the term describing the Swahili language, whereas e.g. *mswahili* describes a Swahili person (Binns, 2006).

³² Khamis (2005:1) talks about *kasida* recitation in addition to *tajwīd*.

community: Through legitimate, peripheral participation in the productive activity, the apprentice gradually learns the craft and is eventually able to participate as a member of full value. (2)*Acquisitioning a professional identity*: The apprentice learns the skills required playing an instrument, and through this process a musical identity emerges. (3)*Learning by doing*: The apprentice is given the opportunity to observe and imitate the master and his fellow musicians through hours of observation. (4)*Practise based evaluation*: Comments and criticism exist in symbiosis with the apprentice's continuous performance. The four principles mentioned have formed the core of musical tutoring in Stone Town. This has changed in recent years. The music education in Stone Town has taken a turn towards a European model of education musicians with teacher-class based instruction since the opening of DCMA in 2002. Madsen (2007) explores how the growing tourism in Stone Town affects the traditional views on taarab and the situation of the performing musicians. He writes about the collaborative project that has existed between DCMA and educational institutions in Norway, mainland Tanzania and Palestine ever since the institution was founded.³³ According to the leader of the project, the turn towards a more Western oriented teaching style is more the wish of DCMA's management than a request from the Western collaborators.

Topp (1992) discusses three different styles of taarab: "Ideal" taarab, *taarab ya wanawake* (women's taarab) and kidumbak. She points out that the "ideal" is modelled on Egyptian (urban) secular music and is consumed primarily by the Arab-oriented sectors of society. Kidumbak, she concludes, is a taarab employed by the Zanzibaris of African descent, developed as a result of being excluded from "ideal" taarab. The taarab ya wanawake, women's taarab, leans in Topp's view aesthetically towards the "ideal", while in practice toward kidumbak. In her dissertation, she places the categories on each end of a continuum, with the taarab ya wanawake in the centre and the two other categories as opposites. Khamis (2004b:6) argues:

The gap between one style and another and between all the styles and the 'ideal' (/ traditional) taarab, appears to exist on the basis of 'style of vocalisation', 'instrumentation', 'method of playing the instruments', 'performer / audience divide' and 'reasons behind the detachment of a certain style / form'.

The history of Stone Town is multifarious. The city early gained a reputation of cosmopolitanism (Simpson & Kresse, 2008) as it was transformed from a small settlement to an urban environment in the 19th century (Bang, 2008). Its transformation changed not only its landscape but also an entire society. Green (2008:129) writes:

³³ See www.zanzibarmusic.org and www.uia.no.

(...) the specific geographical connections fostered by the British Empire opened a new chapter in large-scale migration in the western Indian Ocean. Just as the maritime empire of Oman had dispersed Baluchis, Africans and Arabs between Makran, Zanzibar and Muscat, so Britain's imperial administration and markets saw the migration of Tamil bonded labourers to Natal and Sikh militiamen to British East Africa.

The trade and cultural interchange was extensive and the Zanzibaris were accustomed to and felt at home with it. The earliest mention of *Zanj* (derived from the Indian *Zanzibar* meaning 'country of black men') and its trade is in fact recorded as early as 916/17AD, when Al-Masudi noted that ships sailed regularly from the Persian Gulf (Oman and Siraf) to the island of Unguja (Campbell 2008:66). When Sultan Barghash bin Said's reign came to an end in 1888, the British had systematically eroded the Sultanate's economical and political might to a minimum. Still, the Sultan's legacy was recognisable seeing as Stone Town's inhabitants and their habits, the architecture and the colours were all influenced by the 19th century experience with its Sultanate. At the turn of the century, British leaflets advertising a 'Zanzibar's Brighton' to English soldiers described Stone Town as 'diverse' and 'cosmopolitan'. 'Zanzibar's Brighton' refers to an all-British beach, *Chwaka*, about 30 km east of Stone Town. After visiting the beach, Lord Byron refers to this beach in a rewritten version of 'On a distant view of Harrow' from 1806. The rewritten poem was published in *Zanzibar Gazette* in 1895 (Bang 2008:180). Following Zanzibar's new status as a free port in 1892, imports to the protectorate increased by 29 percent from 1891 to 1898.³⁴

In her article on the *mpasho phenomenon*, Topp Fargion (2000:3) touches on the history of taarab and how it has been seen as "outside" the cross-currents in society. Mpasho refers to the use of taarab lyrics as a means of public messaging between individuals, a more or less improvised conversation or quarrel of two or more singers. It is a sub-category of 'modern taarab', and the name mpasho is derived from a type of lyrics that thrives on openness, cynicism, sexism, sensationalism and exchange of abuses and insults. It also describes a performance that is deliberately calculated to appeal through sensuality and eroticism (Khamis, 2004b:26). Mpasho is considered to be a growing genre in contemporary Stone Town.

Topp Fargion (2000:3) points out that *ideal taarab* once "came to be used by politicians for a period in the lead up to, and after the revolution in 1964 to disseminate political messages", and that several poets within the taarab orchestra ceased to compose

³⁴ By the first town survey in 1893, Zanzibar had no fixed law courts and city planning was nonexistent: residences, burial grounds, cattle sheds and workshops lay side by side. During the years to follow, it was a society marked by a high degree of heterogeneity and pioneering. The latter took place on many levels, one of the most important results being that the courts of Zanzibar were fully organized by 1908 (Bang, 2008).

until love songs were once again permitted. This attitude that taarab and politics should be kept apart, and that taarab should be separated from the daily life of ‘the masses’, was (and still is) very common among the Zanzibari elite (Fair, 2001). Furthermore, Topp Fargion (2000) emphasises that as a result of this reluctance, very few taarab lyrics in kidumbak (the taarab of ‘the masses’) and taarab ya wanawake have been examined. It was not until ‘the mother of taarab’, Siti binti Saad, began performing in the 1930s that the merging of the three categories began with the “Swahili-isation” of the musical style. Siti binti Saad became the first taarab performer to sing in Swahili (as all taarab until then had been sung in Arabic), taking themes from her everyday life into her songs and thus diminishing the distance between the different styles of taarab. So far, taarab had been exclusively a male activity (Ibid.). Fair (2001) points out that many aristocratic women were observed by the sultan Seyyid’s daughter princess Seyyida Salme envying their poorer sisters the opportunity to walk around uncovered and participate in musical happenings. Princess Salme was later known as Emily Ruete after she eloped with a German merchant, with whom she got pregnant and later married (Ruete, 1998; Fair, 2001). As of 2009, Princess Salme’s life is due to become the story of the first Swahili opera.

The fierce competition between the existing *women’s taarab* clubs and the use of lyrics to claim the group’s superiority and attack the other groups are other elements of the mpasho phenomenon outlined by Topp Fargion (2000). She claims that it was this activity that ultimately lead to the fall of taarab ya wanawake, as the competition grew so fierce and violent that women were known to keep away from concerts. In the end, the situation escalated and had to be stopped by the authorities.

Taarab is changing with society in general, and employed actively by its performers to influence events. In her paper “*Capitalism and competition: changes in taarab music performance in Zanzibar*”, Topp Fargion (1999:6) states that “since its introduction to Zanzibar in the 1870s, taarab has moved through cycles of popularity”. In the 1950s, there are few reports on women’s activity, probably due to a strike³⁵ boycotting stores to lower prices and to what is locally termed *wakati wa siasa* (time of electoral politics). Topp Fargion further explains that the strike once again restricted the taarab scene by adding politics to it. Both circumstances led to people joining in a “march to independence”. It is here mentioned how taarab plays an important role in bringing on a strike, only to decline when the strike comes into function. In the 1928

³⁵ For more on the 1948 general strike, see Clayton, 1976.

Ng'ambo ground rent strike, Siti binti Saad and her band helped bring together the community and craft its identity prior to the strike. People talked about the issues that were at the core of the strike and Siti and her band would perform songs about the same issues. When the strike came into function, however, the band continued performing, as opposed to the situation in the 1950s, where the taarab orchestra declined (Askew, 2002; Fair, 2001).

Likewise, there is little memory of taarab from 1964 to the 1970s, due to governmental regulations of taarab in order to reinforce the ideologies of the newly independent country Tanzania. The Republic of Zanzibar (independent in 1963) and the Republic of Tanganyika (independent in 1961) were merged into The United Republic of Tanzania in 1964, and with the new republic great political changes followed (Askew 2002).

Ideal taarab was, as mentioned, primarily the music of the Arab upper classes. Julius Nyerere and the new politic system of socialism led to i.a. redistributed wealth, with a process of de-Arabization as result, as well as strive for gender equality and breakdown of the segregation of the sexes (Ibid.). Integration into the system required acceptance of the one-party rule. Protests over a certain degree and challenging Nyerere's leadership and state as such, would be met with oppression and exclusion (Hirschler, 2004).

The last four decades the United Republic of Tanzania has been influenced by the bifurcated identities of *Tanzania Bara* (mainland Tanzania) and *Tanzania Visiwani* (island Tanzania, i.e. Zanzibar) and there is an ongoing debate whether a third government is needed. The Zanzibar government controls the internal affairs of the archipelago, such as primary and secondary education, health, agriculture, communication, the court system and the cultural policy. The Union government is situated on the mainland and concerns itself with the internal affairs of the former Tanganyika as well as overseeing Union issues such as defence, citizenship, foreign affairs, police and higher education (Askew 2002). Several taarab lyrics deal with these political topics in either a direct or subtle way.

Between 1978 and 1984, the rivalry between the women's groups flared up again as outlined by Topp Fargion (1999:5):

The fighting reached such levels (...) that the government had to intervene. All groups had to register with the Ministry for Information and Culture, and all songs had to be vetted by a censorship board before they could be performed. (...) Mpasho activity would have continued, I believe, were it not for this intervention.

Since Ali Hessian Winy replaced Miserere as the country's leader in 1985, the economy has been growing, and there is a growing liberalisation and encouragement of foreign investment. Tourism, Topp Fargion states, has been viciously promoted since about 1992 (Loc.cit.).

The economical situation for taarab musicians has not changed accordingly, as discussed by Topp Fargion's paper from 1999. Although the circumstances described are not necessarily true of the contemporary situation, they clearly demonstrate what processes taarab is and has been subject to. First of all, the unemployment rate in 1999 is very high and living costs have soared. Women depending on marriage to financially support them report that they now need more than one relationship to sustain their way of life. Men have also reported to be unable to marry due to lack of capital and financial security.

Moreover, Topp Fargion emphasises that the taarab scene is once again one of rivalry, including physical fights, especially during the performances of the group East African Melody.³⁶ This is also true of the contemporary situation. The fighting on the taarab scene is considered closely connected to the political situation in Zanzibar e.g. in the recent 2001 conflict between the two political parties, the ruling Civic United Front (CUF) and the opposition party *Chama Cha Mapinduzi*. The latter translates to 'Party of the Revolution', which is abbreviated to CMM (Hirschler, 2004).

In spite of the growing changes in urban societies worldwide, tourists still consider the music they encounter when they arrive in Stone Town the "genuine" music. Kvifte (2001) talks in his article *Hunting for the Gold at the End of the Rainbow: Identity and Global Romanticism* about global and local romanticism, and names it "the modern personality market", the "hunt for authenticity" and "the struggle to find one's own identity in a multitude of possibilities" are central aspects of a music's life.³⁷ Although romanticism will not be explored in this thesis, it is noteworthy that taarab seems to hold a romanticized position with the increasing number of tourists arriving in Zanzibar – a kind of quintessential authenticity. Madsen (2007:2) describes taarab and tourism as "a focal point for efforts to turn Zanzibar into a cultural epicentre of East Africa and the Indian Ocean Region". Taarab is thus seen as a cultural heritage by the inhabitants of

³⁶ *East African Melody* is a modern taarab group and not a group performing "ideal" taarab, kidumbak or women's taarab.

³⁷ The concept of authenticity will not be explored upon in this thesis. I nevertheless mention that Haji and Cuypers (2008:3) argue that there is no such thing as authenticity *per se*, but defend a relational view of the term: motivational elements (e.g. desires) are "part of a person's evaluative scheme" and hence not authentic "in their own right". This is consonant with Kvifte's (2001) view of the "hunt" and an interesting view to take in the changing Stone Town where the discussion of what is 'original' and 'genuine' is intensified with the growing tourism.

Stone Town as well as by the tourists, and for this reason “epitomizes cultural tourism in Zanzibar”. This development from amateurism towards professionalism is controversial, considering that it is taking place within a dominant Muslim community. His observations are consonant with those of other researchers, such as the views on musical proficiency in Islam and views on music and amateurism versus professionalism outlined in Abu-Lughod (1993), Kirkegaard (1996), Khamis (2001; 2005) and Topp (1992).

Many countries have seen growth and vast changes the last decades, although few researchers have concluded what effect this has on the musical development in the respective countries (Kirkegaard, 1996). Like the rest of the world, Stone Town bears the marks of the growing urbanization into what Nettl (2005:433) calls ‘the global village’, namely that the world becomes smaller through increased travel opportunities and electronic media. This view is shared by Khamis (2004a), in his essay *Images of Love in the Swahili Taarab Lyric*, where he states that with both the introduction of liberalisation policies in Zanzibar and Tanzania and an intensification of global influences through the media, the focus in taarab texts have shifted dramatically. Prior to the 1990s, taarab lyrics normally depicted romanticized love between the sexes.

Racy (2003:225) thus writes the following on taarab’s situation in modern society:

(...) from one perspective, the music of taarab seems curtailed and marginalized. From another, it appears well rooted, timeless and increasingly internationalized. Together, these perspectives remind us of music’s vulnerability and resilience as a human expression. Obviously, the future of taarab will depend on how the coming generations will experience and value its message.

He goes on saying that taarab endures through a dual pattern of adapting to current social and technological realities on one hand, and keeping a rather discreet profile on the other (Ibid.:225). Both Racy (2003) and Kirkegaard (1996) state that culture is change, existing in a perpetual synthesis of stability and alteration, past and present. Kirkegaard (Ibid.:42) claims that only catastrophic situations can break this synthesis seeing as we stop recognizing our own culture only when incidents no longer make sense. Taarab has to be constantly changing, and yet preserve its musical core, in order to reflect the culture to its fullest.

Khamis (2004a:1) is critical to the many articles remarking on the nature, definition and history of taarab, which he thinks are serving more to “expose a clash of interest rather than provide untainted facts about [taarab’s] conceptualisation”. In an answer to several researchers who have offered critic of the way Anglo-American music has influenced forms of local, indigenous music, he writes (Ibid.:4-5):

There is nothing wrong in ideal *taarab* to branch off into sub-categories for specific functions and roles, the way all complex music(s) of the world or in fact art in general does for various reasons. It is not proper that a certain music type should be belittled just because it is the music of the so-called elite or it closely interdefines with Arabism or with any other foreign styles.

Since *taarab* is an art, Khamis claims that its primary function is an aesthetic one: Topp's (1992) model of a "social fact", though making *taarab* more complex, therefore only has an additional and supportive role. Nevertheless, Khamis (2004a:23) claims that as any art must grow, metamorphose and diversify if it is to survive, the different forms of *taarab* must be measured "on the yardstick" of ideal *taarab*. He thus claims that ideal *taarab* has a historical significance, and that society is gauged with this in terms of "progression and retrogression" (Loc.cit.). In his definition of *taarab*, Khamis includes not only the ideal *taarab*, but also several forms of music such as *mipasho taarab*, *taa-rap* and *rusha-roho*. On ideal *taarab*, however, he points out that it, having 97 years of experience, has proved its popularity sufficiently.

Topp's dissertation (1992) focuses the Zanzibari women in *taarab* music where men traditionally play the main role in both the composition and the performance of the style. She uses the cultural realm of *taarab* as a case study, suggesting that women are far from being "mere objects of little interest both musically and socially" in a Muslim society. On the contrary, she argues, the women are guardians of the deep traditions and identity. She suggests that it is through the women's participation, mainly as primary consumers and audiences, but also as poets and as what she calls "innovators of musical concepts", that *taarab* has been Africanized. This makes the women much more than "mere objects of little interest both musically and socially" (Ibid.:2) since they have created a public realm of their own. This view is shared by Ntarangwi (2003), who claims that *taarab* is not only a public space to express views and experiences. It is also a place where women are "deconstructing the myth of gendered subjects where men are seen as superior" (Ibid.:285). Ntarangwi continues to point out that the Swahili traditions contain several *rites de passages* for women, such as *vugo*, *chakacha* and *msondo*. In such ceremonies girls are taught how to be women, which includes being taught sexual movements that will enhance their sexual performances when married. Men, Ntarangwi argues, have no such traditions. He suggests that the lack of such songs for men have contributed to the popularization of modern *taarab* songs engaging the subject, as the songs fill a void in the traditional male musical repertoire.

Constructing gender-specific identities through music is thus a common practice with the Swahili. But whereas the female identity constructions involve open references to sexuality, male sexuality is developed indirectly through song and dance where no specific sexual movements are mentioned. Ntarangwi sees this as a further indication that women are more than what Topp (1992) calls “mere objects” in the taarab context. This may date back to the post-abolition period, as suggested by Fair (2001). Shortly after the abolition of slavery in 1897, asserting control over their own sexuality was a key component in women’s struggle for autonomy. During the slavery, elite men’s sexual access to black women was “both a tool and a symbol of their institutional rights and coercive power” (Ibid.:210). In songs like *Wewe Paka* (You Cat), Siti binti Saad and her band celebrated African women’s right to reject unwanted advances, and popularised critiques of Arab male class and sexual dominance.

In the books *Veiled Sentiments: Honor[sic.] and Poetry in a Bedouin Society* (1999) and *Writing Women’s Worlds* (1993), Abu-Lughod describes the relationships, circumstances and practices of the women and men in the Awlad ‘Ali Bedouin families in the Western Desert of Egypt. *Veiled Sentiments* was first published in 1986 and in the 1999 preface some of the changes that have affected the lives of the Bedouin community are described. Abu-Lughod (1999:47f) describes how women and men draw unfavourable comparisons between the (urban) Egyptians and their own tribe, calling themselves ‘Arabs’ and the non-Bedouin ‘Egyptians’, saying that “among the Arabs the man rules the woman, not like the Egyptians whose women can come and go as they please” and that “the Egyptians are not like us. They have no shame”. When speaking of sexual behaviour, the girls of the tribe are instructed not to sleep with her husband on the wedding night, due to modesty, and Abu-Lughod writes that many women would deny that intercourse had taken place, even when it was obvious to all that it had (loc.cit). Modesty, therefore, has an important place amongst the Muslim Bedouin women. Abu-Lughod offers many insights into the culture and artistry of women in a Muslim culture. This is of great interest to this thesis as the women in contemporary Stone Town find themselves at the junction between a traditional Muslim society and the increasing Western influences.

In *Writing Women’s Worlds*, Abu-Lughod (1993) points out that many of the women, whose stories she is narrating, do not see themselves as isolated individuals. They belong to a community where they are surrounded by three generations of relatives on a daily basis. The different chapters in the book therefore focus on certain types of

relationships between individuals and their surroundings, thus describing the closeness in the families and the networks that are at work. The views on family relations and the emphasis put on being accepted by the local community expressed in Abu-Lughod's works are consonant with views expressed by the informants in chapter five of this thesis. The 'lifeworlds' (Kvale, 1997) of the informants hold a similar sense of community belonging and interdependence as that of the Arab women described in Abu-Lughod's narratives.

4.0 METHODOLOGY

The research design in the present thesis is qualitative, informed by the hermeneutic research tradition. The methodology of the study is qualitative oriented, focusing on interpreting and interactive working process. Such an interpreting position is based on the informant's statements as well as the researcher's pre-understanding and focuses experiences and events (Kvale 2001). The research tradition adopted is thus about *understanding* and *interpreting* meaningful phenomena and *describing* how understanding is made possible, aiming for a "thick description" (Geertz, 1973). Any language consists of a set of conventions "encoding ontology"³⁹ – how the world is and is supposed to be. The hermeneutic approach has the benefits and "the sophistication of textual interpretation" (Briggs, C. 1986:113), an oscillation between theory and empiricism, between the pieces and the entirety.

4.1 The qualitative research interview

The research method adopted is the qualitative research interview (Kvale, 2001). This interview form has been employed as an independent research method for the past decades (Wadel, 1991; Myers, 1992), and is currently employed within several research fields, namely anthropology, psychology and sociology as well as ethnomusicology. By employing semi-structured interviews as the chosen method of data collection, the intention in this text has been to provide nuanced descriptions of the informants' *lifeworlds* and their experience with performing taarab music in Stone Town (cf. Kvale 2001:39). To accomplish this, I have used a narrative approach which means that the interviewer assumes an open and listening role, allowing the informant to narrate in his or her own order and pace. The result has a narrative or epic form (Holloway & Jefferson, 2000). Although I have assumed this open – some times even naïve – role, I

³⁹ Travick, 1990:193.

have worked with an interview guide with questions. However, as the informants have been able to narrate at their own pace, they have emphasized different questions and aspects in their narratives. As Dingwall (1997:58) writes, the research interview comes at a point where “order is deliberately put under stress”. It is a situation where the informants show their competence in the role they have been given, and is thus based on a system of taking turns. The interviewer raises certain subjects, whereupon the informant offers answers according to local conditions (loc.cit.).

One of the advantages with the qualitative research interview is the opportunity it offers to delve into every interview. The interviewer can continually assess the informants’ behaviour and attitude towards the situation and the questions (Liebert & Liebert, 1995:250). In this way, the informant may present information he or she would not have revealed if the interviewer had used e.g. a questionnaire. When faced with a new situation, the interviewer is carefully manoeuvring himself or herself into the context in order to explore and outline meaningful units, gradually finding a way towards meaningful questions and appropriate body language.⁴⁰

Nettl (2005:137) supports the view of the qualitative research interview as an apt way of accessing knowledge and maintains that the information gathered can be grouped into three categories: (i) texts, (ii) structures and (iii) “the imponderabilia of everyday life”. He argues that the study of texts allows the researcher to access a large group of data. These data are informative combined with an understanding of underlying structures, i.e. statements that enable the researcher to note important principles of e.g. behaviour. Although the group (i) and (ii) above are necessary, it is the third group of data accessed that enables the researcher to find coherence in the other two groups. The imponderabilia referred to describes factors of everyday life not easily measured, the “between the lines” within an interview situation. The category includes information about the details taken for granted in everyday life, such as approved behaviour, who is talking to who and differences in body language (loc.cit.).

Additional information in this thesis stem from my own field notes which include a log book and reflexive notes. Occasionally, observations such as watching the

⁴⁰ According to Taylor & Bogdan (1984:77-78), the main difference between the qualitative research interview and participant observation lies within the research context. In participant observation, the context can be described as more or less “natural” for the informant and to a certain extent for the researcher as well. In the qualitative research interview, both informant and researcher find themselves in a constructed situation, where the surroundings are organized so as to maximise the outcome of the conversation. Like Deutscher (1973), Taylor & Bogdan (1984) discuss the discrepancies between said and done actions.

behaviour of a group, listening to its members and noting the group's physical characteristics have been included in my field notes.⁴¹

4.2 Collecting data

Taarab music in Stone Town is a narrow field, and literature on the subject shows signs of this. The research literature on taarab music has been obtained in different ways. I have been in touch with experienced researchers in the field and received useful tips and references. Dissertations on the subject (and their bibliographies) have also been of great help. Numerous searches in databases and on the Internet, using key words such as 'taarab', 'gender', 'Stone Town', 'perform' and 'history' have also proved useful. During my visits to Zanzibar, I also found valuable literature.

In collecting data several framework conditions were taken into consideration. One of these is my own *personal* interest in the performance of taarab in Stone Town. I originally came to Zanzibar as a cello teacher and have watched the development within the taarab scene the last years. My interest in the contemporary situation is therefore that of a musician as well as a researcher. Since I was travelling alone without the safety net of e.g. an exchange program, I spent many hours organising and financing the trip and keeping in touch with my sources in Stone Town.

As the aims in this study reflected, I wished to elaborate on the knowledge of performing taarab in Stone Town *today*. In the months I spent organizing the field trip, I increased my awareness of the research methods and how to process available material.

4.3 Carrying out the interviews

The interviews were carried out within a period of two weeks, after several rearrangements and schedule changes. All participants were interviewed in their natural environment, either at their workplace, in their homes or in a known location in Stone Town.⁴² This is often a good strategy, as people seem to be more comfortable in familiar environments. Although there may be some disruptions during the interview, such as family members or friends dropping by or staying to listen or watch, these are generally more upsetting to the researcher than the informant (Beaudry 1997:74ff). I understand and speak enough Swahili well enough to manage getting around and teaching how to play the cello, but as I was determined to transcribe and analyze the results in English,

⁴¹ Briggs, C. (1986:19) characterises such observations as part of the participant observation research method. Even though participant observation has not been a research method in this study, certain entries from my field notes have been useful while discussing the empirical material.

⁴² Full transcriptions of the interviews are not available in the electronic edition.

the questions were asked in English. The informants expressed their contentment with the arrangement, although their language skills vary. Words spoken in Swahili were either translated during the interview or on the transcription. The interviews normally began with a general conversation before I turned the focus of the conversation over to the questions at hand and started the recording equipment. When clarifications of the questions or answers were needed, they were cleared up during the interviews and are visible in the transcriptions. If the informants' answers covered more than the question they were asked, they were not interrupted⁴³, seeing as relevant information could emerge from the new direction of the interview. If the informants paused, they were allowed to think without being pushed. In such cases I attempted to understand whether they were thinking or simply waiting for the next question.

As mentioned, researcher's role was aimed to be a neutral, attentive and interested, only occasionally repeating the informant's last statement as a sign to go on with further conversation. I chose to record the interviews because it enabled me to maintain the before mentioned attentive role without being hampered with a notebook. However, the last part of Bilal's interview is a summary of written notes, as he expressed a wish to talk without the recording equipment present. The interviews were recorded by using an mp3 player or the program Logic and the internal microphone on my Macintosh.

4.4.1 Selecting the informants

Prior to the fieldwork, I contacted some of the musicians I knew could provide valuable information and arranged a meeting with them. Even though I knew some of the informants before I arrived, I was unsure what kind of information was going to emerge from the interviews. The management of DCMA was helpful with introducing me to several possible musicians, one of whom ended up as an informant. Two of the informants were teachers at DCMA, one was a student on one instrument and teacher on another. The fourth informant is a taarab composer and student on an instrument, however not in the academy. The selection consists of four individuals between 26 and 66 years old; one from Tanzanian mainland, two Zanzibari and one Palestinian. All four lived and worked in Zanzibar at the time of the interviews and were involved in performing taarab in Stone Town. Although all four play a taarab instrument on some level, one is primarily a taarab composer who has taken up an instrument in recent years.

⁴³ Cf. the narrative approach in the semi-structured interview (4.1). See also Briggs, C., 1986; Steinmetz, 1991; Bartz and Cooley, 1997.

Three of the informants are still active on the taarab scene in Stone Town, whereas the fourth has moved to Europe. I knew two of them from earlier visits whereas the two others were new acquaintances. It is important to note that I became acquainted with all four participants when I was a musician and teacher and only later on interviewed the four as a field researcher. This position also includes the two new acquaintances.

I have tried to find as representative a selection of informants as possible. The four participants vary in age, gender, background, instrument and main musical interest. They have different musical background, as well as family background. Two are teachers at the music academy in Stone Town, whereas the third is (mainly) a student and the fourth a former broadcasting director and cultural persona. The informants have been chosen for different reasons. It was important to me that the two genders were equally represented and that I could interview a young and an elder of each gender. The two women are untraditional in their choice of work and life situation, while simultaneously living within acknowledged bounds of respectability in the Stone Town society. The informants' backgrounds are varied and differing and so are their life conditions. Such variations among the informants allow for variety as well as nuance in the empirical data.

How many informants should I include? Kvale answers this with a simple "interview as many as is necessary to find out what you need to know" (Kvale 2001:58, my translation). He also argues the principle of quality before quantity within the qualitative research paradigm, as the hermeneutic researchers are more concerned with the search for meaning than measure (Ibid.:60). In my opinion, the four informants represent an adequate breadth. They are able to speak confidently about several matters and together they form a good entity. If I had interviewed more informants, my data material could have been more varied. However, the amount of information gathered could easily have gone beyond the scope of a master's thesis.

The informants' last names are not mentioned in this text (cf. 6.2 *Ethical considerations*). At birth, Zanzibaris are given one first name as well as the father's first and second names. The father's second name is normally the name of the newborn's grandfather, thus keeping three generations of history within one name and leaving the Zanzibaris with three names. If the grandfather's name was Abdallah and the father's given name was Mohamed, the young boy would be named his given name, e.g. Yusuf, as well as the two paternal relatives'. Hence, the name would be Yusuf Mohamed Abdallah. In Matona's (who is one of the informants, cf. 4.4.2 below) case, this results in his given names remaining unmentioned in this text, as the used name is a nickname and

not a given name. However, as most Zanzibaris and foreigners alike know him by this name and as he inherited the nickname from his musician father, he is neither more nor less exposed in this text than the other informants.

4.4.2 Description of informants

ZAINAB is a 33-year-old woman with a big smile and energetic persona. She grew up in the south of Tanzania in a small town called Mtwara, belonging to the *makonde* tribe. Before she came to Stone Town in 2003 she lived a while in Dar es Salaam and then moved to Bagamoyo, i.e. still on the Tanzanian mainland. Here she spent three years training to be a sculptor before she moved to Stone Town and took up the guitar at DCMA. However, after one month she switched instruments to the accordion and has been training and practising this ever since. She is currently active in one of Stone Town's two original taarab orchestra as well as teaching young children at the music school both in taarab music and on the recorder. Additionally, she plays traditional drums, dances and sings. Although neither her parents nor her siblings practised music, she grew up singing in the local children's choir in her town. This was the time she began to take an interest in music. Her opinions on the subject of women's position and opportunities in the Zanzibari society, especially as regards music, are many and strong. She is currently the only regular female member of the big taarab orchestra. She is normally attired in different kinds of kanga and trousers, as she does not like the *buibui*. Nevertheless, she occasionally wears the headscarf in public, together with the ankle length and long sleeved black thin robe.

MARIAM is 66 years old and a well-known figure in Zanzibar's cultural life. She grew up in Mkunazini, near the market in Stone Town. She is a vital personality with a great deal of experience with management in musical contexts as well as within the broadcasting system. She also has extensive committee and board experience. As she grew up in a privileged and educated family, she was given the benefits of education as a child and young woman. Her education has brought her to Beijing, Moscow, Hague, Tampere and Geneva, as well as several other locations in Africa and Asia. Her special fields are language, history, philosophy and international relations, health and development. Her mother and her oldest brother raised Mariam, as her father, who was many years her mother's senior passed away when she was eight. She has several brothers and sister, several of whom were interested in music and now hold central positions in Zanzibari governmental and cultural life. As one of the few great female

taarab composers, she has written several well-known taarab songs. She lives in the same house as her husband, who is one of Zanzibar's most famous contemporary composers, a singer, a violinist and keyboard player: Mohamed Ilyas. She has an adult son from a previous marriage and has helped raise her husband's daughter as well.

BILAL is a 28-year-old Palestinian musician, the oud teacher at DCMA at the time of the interviews.⁴⁴ In 2008 he moved to Europe, where he currently has success as a performer and composer in several different contexts. He is reflective and well read in several fields. While at the music academy, he shared the position as artistic director with the academy's Norwegian bass-, guitar- and piano teacher. During Bilal's time in Stone Town he held a central role in numerous performances and recordings. He went to high school in the town of Daboryya outside Jerusalem and at the age of 13 taught himself to play the oud from recordings available to him at his parents' house. His truck driver father eventually agreed to finance his training until he left home. At the age of 18 he was accepted to The Hebrew University in Jerusalem, Music Department of Fine Arts and Musical Performance, where he completed his major in oud, graduating in 2004. During and after his studies in Jerusalem he performed with the Nazareth Orchestra on several occasions. Between his time as an oud student in Jerusalem and a teacher in Stone Town he worked as a music editor at Allforpeace Radio Station in Jerusalem. In the same period of time, he also worked as a music teacher and artistic director in Itar Music Institution in Jerusalem. Neither his parents nor his siblings work with music, nor does his Danish wife. Bilal came to Zanzibar through the Peace Corps' exchange programs.

MATONA, 40 years old, is one of Zanzibar's most renowned musicians. He has an agreeable manner and a curious disposition, which has brought him to play different instruments. His specialities are the oud, violin and drums. However, he also plays several instruments including the cello, qanun, trombone and piano. Strings and drums are his forte. As a child, he spent time in both Stone Town and the smaller East Coast town Paje. Although he spent his first years in the countryside and moved permanently to Stone Town when he was eight years old, his mother had close ties to Paje on the east coast. She was from a prominent family of the *mayache* tribe and used to bring her children to the *shamba* (the countryside) as often as she could. Although his given name is not Matona he usually goes by that name in everyday speech, as well as on stage (cf. 4.1 *Selecting the informants* above). As a boy he used to organise the other children in

⁴⁴ Interview with Bilal on his work at DCMA can be found in the article *The Oud keeps its grounds in modern times* (Mani, 2008).

bands and perform and practice until he was called home late at night. His first formal musical education was drumming at Chimkana Youth Centre at the age of seven or eight. After finishing elementary school and performing in his father's orchestra, he moved to the Tanzanian mainland and continued his education in several different institutions. His father was one of Tanzania and Zanzibar's most renowned musicians, and according to his son, responsible for bringing taarab to the African mainland. Matona has two wives, one Zanzibari and one Dutch. His eight children are given musical training, although they are not brought along to his taarab practice as much as he himself was when he was a boy.

4.5 Processing the data

4.5.1 Transcription

The method of transcription is time-consuming but provides the researcher with accurate recollections of what has been said. I therefore transcribed the interviews word by word. Due to this procedure, there are syntactical errors in the transcriptions and the quotes. Because there are several lingual errors in each interview, these are not marked with [sic] as would be customary practice.

The transcriptions were done partly directly after the recording was completed, and partly after returning to Norway. Throughout the text, proper nouns (e.g. Culture Music Club) have been underlined, whereas non-English words (e.g. *Sauti za Busara*) are presented in Italic font. Some informants chose to give parts of the answers in Swahili. In these cases I have marked the English translation with []. This [] also marks my explanations in places where the context needs clarification as well as following sounds such as laughter and coughs. When quotes in the text are interrupted by (...), it marks a cut in the text or a pause in the conversation. The meaning of a statement is not changed when only parts of a conversation is quoted.

4.5.2 Analysis

Between the original narrative, told to the interviewer, and the final story, publicly presented by the researcher, lies the interview analysis. (Kvale 2001:118, my translation).

To analyze a material is to split them in pieces and elements (Loc.cit.). I have chosen to divide the empirical material into several categories and sub-categories (see 5.0 below) in order to give an account of the information made available through fieldwork. The categories are derived from the informants' preoccupation with certain subjects that shed

light on the contemporary situation of performing taarab in Stone Town. They have differing views on the various topics and discuss subjects such as music, family, gender and religion as well as more personal topics such as personal motivations and challenges. In the discussion (see 6.0 below) the empirical material in the categories has been grouped into three main headings. Based on the results and analysis, the discussion is arranged as follows: 6.1) Accessing and performing taarab, with the sub-headings getting access, learning by doing and staying in the game. 6.2) Contemporary challenges, with underlying differences and ongoing processes in society elaborating on the headings; and 6.3) thoughts on participation on the taarab scene in contemporary society.

4.6 Evaluating project and research method

4.6.1 Time frame

Lundberg & Ternhag (2002) argues that fieldwork is bilateral. On the one hand there is the practical and technical aspect which is easily detected as the researcher is preparing to leave, or handles the practicalities during the fieldwork. On the other hand, there is an aspect of the fieldwork that touches on its motive and inner life, i.e. its significance in the scholarly process. The time frame of such a process is always of significance. The interviews were carried out during a two-week period in January and February of 2008. The time frame of the fieldwork was limited but seeing as I had access to the informants prior to my fieldwork in 2008 as well as much knowledge of taarab music and Stone Town before I decided to make taarab the focus of my thesis, the process has been a longer one than the time frame of the fieldwork implicates. Additional information from the informants was derived in February 2009 and by e-mail during 2008 and winter 2009. Extended trips between 2004 and 2009 have generated a general cultural knowledge about issues in Zanzibar. In addition to the interviews conducted during the spring 2008 fieldwork and contact by e-mail, some of the empirical data discussed in this thesis stem from observations made in the period between 2004 and 2009.

The music festival *Sauti za Busara* took place during my 2008 fieldwork, and the informants were occupied with preparations and performances. When the festival ended I had participated alongside Zanzibari musicians and was more aware of problems in connection with the fieldwork. I also made useful additional field notes during the festival period. When the festival was finished, the informants had more time on their hands and the interviews were easily arranged.

4.6.2 Researcher and musician

I was introduced to the informants as a musician, and spent many hours playing with them before I asked for an interview. Thus, the informants see me primarily as a musician. This will have influenced their answers somewhat. Neither of the informants explain musical expressions, *Swahili* words describing music, the names of taarab instruments, fellow musicians or recent changes in society. Several statements in the transcription of the interviews are therefore evident to the informant and myself and not necessarily to other readers.

Another challenge in knowing the informants as musician as well as researcher, is the researcher's bias to steer the conversation to topics known to be interesting. Spradley (1979) points out that language is an important factor in an interview situation, and not only when the interviewing takes place in a foreign language. Although a researcher is interviewing inside his or her 'own culture', this is not to be mistaken for in 'own culture group' (Wadel 1991).

4.6.3 Validity and trustworthiness

Reliability and validity refer to "the benchmarks by which data analysis and collection are measured" (Briggs 1986:23). Briggs goes on to say that 'reliability' is achieved when the same procedure is repeated, either by the same researcher or another investigator, and produces the same results. 'Validity', on the other hand, refers to the "successfulness" of a given technique; whether the results mirror the characteristics of the phenomena that are being examined (Loc.cit.). To achieve these two in a qualitative study can be challenging, as the research to a considerable extent is based on the researcher's interpretations.

The informants' knowledge and statements may be untrue, or at least insufficient, and hence not valid (Kvale 2001:169). Consequently, in order to monitor the quality of the interviews, the material should go through a validation process in all stages of the study (Ibid.:164). The researcher must aim for a clarifying description of the actual facts, as well as choosing a selection of themes to represent the whole. Also, the question of representativeness is important, namely whether the chosen informants are representative to the whole group of musicians in Stone Town (cf. 4.4.1 *Selecting the informants* above).

According to Taylor & Bogdan, the interview method, like all forms of human conversation, is susceptible to all forms of exaggerations, understatements, deception, dishonesty, forgetfulness and self-delusion. There may be discrepancies, consciously or

unconsciously done, between what is said and what the informant would do in a given situation. Moreover, human beings do not behave alike in unlike situations, and one persons behaviour may change when the context changes, however slight the latter may be. Both Deutscher (1973) and Taylor & Bogdan (1984) discuss these discrepancies between said and done actions.

The reliability of the project deals with the consistency of the research finds (Kvale 2001:164). It is, however, not the data in themselves that may be unreliable, but the researcher's (weak) interpretation of the same (Hammersley & Atkinson 1996). The empirical data I am discussing in this thesis are specific for this interview study only. Hence, my participation and reflexive notes may work as solid sources as long as I am aware of how my own role have influenced the data along with the framework conditions.

4.6.4 Further ethical considerations

When carrying out a research study, several factors have to be taken into consideration. In a study like this, the research has to be both ethically justifiable to the informants' interests and reasonable towards the aims of the research. The context in which the research is conducted also has to be taken into account.

The informants either signed a written informed consent (Kvale 2001:67) or I was given oral consent. The consent states the main aims in this study and allows the researcher to refer to the material gathered from the informant. It also states that sensitive material given by the informants under the condition of anonymity will not be available to others. The informants gave their permission to the use of their real names in the study. I have chosen to leave out the last names, as well as any sensitive information (as agreed with the informants). The four informants knew exactly when the recording equipment was on and that their entire narratives were recorded and transcribed.

The fact that the informants knew me before the interviews were carried out presented me with both advantages and challenges. The pre-knowledge was an advantage in that they believed I would understand their situation and their statements, as I had conversed with Zanzibaris before and knew the Stone Town society more than a newcomer would. They felt sure that I would treat their interviews with proper respect and they knew they could rely on me as a person.

One challenge of the situation was that the informants easily could say more than they intended, as speaking to me about some of the topics discussed in the interviews would not be an unusual situation. The fact that I understood meanings and made connections more easily than a first time visitor presented a challenge for me personally as well. If a specific person or a situation was referred to and I understood the connections because of my knowledge of the context and society, I made an effort to ask follow-up questions that would clarify the informant's statement on the transcriptions. Still, as I already had a musical relationship with each informant before asking for an interview, they might have felt obliged to participate and therefore agreed to be interviewed. This means that the positive response I got could be due to a reluctance to disappoint me by refusing. On the other hand, the informants might have felt sure that I would treat the material in a safe way and that they could trust me.

Babiracki (1997:121f) claims that gender, or gender identity, always will have an effect on an interview situation although it is impossible for the researcher to predict exactly *what* effect it has. To predict an informant's response is not possible, and will only serve to have a restrictive effect on the interview process. Improvisation is therefore a useful tool. Nevertheless, all people react to whatever patterns there are in inter-communicational situations.

The fact that I am a female interviewer may have lead the male informants to withhold information regarded as "men only" in the Stone Town society. However, as I have experienced (cf. 1.2 above) I believe I am first and foremost seen as a musician whose knowledge on an instrument is of interest to the other musicians. The fact that I have performed and taught alongside many of the informants may have given me access to information in spite of my gender. Information given by the female informants is no doubt coloured by the fact that they felt they could speak more freely to me than to a male interviewer – something they have expressed on occasions.

In most parts of this thesis, the sources have been named and dated. However, certain subjects are sensitive to the individuals in question and their statements would cause difficulties should it become known what their opinions are. On these occasions, the quotes or opinions voices have, on direct request from the sources, been marked with 'anonymous' in the text. I have chosen to include some of the quotes given anonymously, as they shed light on important aspects of the contemporary situation. Madsen (2007), who also faced the climate of contemporary Stone Town in his thesis, has chosen a resembling approach.

5.0 EMPIRICAL DATA AND ANALYSIS

The present study addresses the contemporary situation of performing taarab in Stone Town. To explore such a topic, I have interviewed four musicians in Stone Town. The procedure of analysing the data from the interviews is previously presented in the thesis (cf. 4.5 *Processing the data*).

This chapter aims to provide an overview of the statements and viewpoints of the contemporary situation offered by the informants, concentrating on the analysis of the empirical material and suggesting key issues. I have also included some small personal comments and a few references to literature in this section to provide for a contextualisation when I have found it especially clarifying. However, the empirical findings are discussed and summarized into main headings in order to elaborate on the key research questions in the discussion presented in chapter 6.0 below. In the same chapter, the empirical data are also more fully related to theoretical concepts and previous research.

The empirical data is structured and organised into five main categories with accompanying sub-categories. The main headings (categories) are: *beginning* (5.1), *learning* (5.2.), *continuing* (5.3), *challenges* (5.4.) and *changes* (5.5). With reference to the categorisation, I would like to mention that occasionally some of the sub-categories are overlapping somewhat, as several of the informants' answers may be understood and discussed within more than one context. The informants cover different angles of the questions at hand and the informants' involvement vary in the different aspects of the empirical material. When an individual's view is unmentioned, it is because he or she made no remarks on the subject in question, or was reluctant to have his or her view represented.

5.1 Beginning

The first core category describes *the beginning* of a musical career and factors influencing that beginning. Whether a person has the chance of performing music in the contemporary society seems to be determined by key issues such as family conditions, a potential musician's interest in music and the issue of gender in Stone Town.

5.1.1 Family

According to the data, the role of a person's family background is a pivotal factor in giving a young child the opportunity to play a musical instrument. In families unwilling to invest money or time in music, the situation is similar to that in Europe where the children of such families have small chances of receiving musical training. All children face different conditions growing up, and the informants are no exceptions. Both Matona and Mariam have recollections of a childhood where they were *surrounded by music*. In Mariam's case the elder brothers were more than averagely interested in music; the eldest a member of a taarab orchestra and the other fond of concerts and dancing. In Matona's childhood it was his father who represented the main musical interest. Mariam remembers when Radio Zanzibar (or *Sauti ya Unguja*) was introduced in 1951 as one of the decisive moments for her musical interest. She says it was a surprise for everybody; "you know, it was the first time [with radio]". When shops were playing the Kenyan and Zanzibari radio in the streets, she used to play outside her house with the other children, every day from 4 to 6:15 pm, thus familiarizing herself with different musical styles:

So you listen to this music. And then there were various types of taarab that I could hear. By then, the only taarab group, which was really performing, was Nadi Ikhwani Safaa (...) and then Siti Binti Saad songs. (...) So they had a radio station, which was called *Sauti ya Mvita*. Now, this *Sauti ya Mvita* used to play many taarab songs. But in the form of Mombassa style. So I used to hear this Zanzibar style and Mombassa style.

Mariam also describes how her mother listened to Siti binti Saad songs at home whenever she could "on her time". Running a household was time consuming, and Mariam remembers how her mother treasured the moments when she could listen to music. Mariam and her sisters would listen attentively whenever a record from His Master's Voice⁴⁶ was playing at home, as that would be taarab from Mombassa or Zanzibar. There would be shorter taarab songs, songs in *Kiswahili* and songs from Egypt in Arabic. "My ears were full of music", she says.

Matona spent time in rehearsals with his musician father from the age of five and was given the "shake, or drum, tam – always I was drumming". The remaining hours of the day he passed in the streets drumming and playing with other children (in both cases, he claims, to his mother's frustration). Unlike today, there were always children playing in the streets. In contemporary Stone Town the children spend more time at home, often in front of the television. When Matona was a boy, there was no television, and children

⁴⁶ His Master's Voice (usually abbreviated to HMV) is the name of a record label, which extensively recorded the taarab icon Siti binti Saad (Topp Fargion, 2000). Gramophone Company bought the name in 1899 and its logo is a well-known dog listening to a wind-up gramophone (Retrieved July 14, 2007 from www.grovemusiconline.com).

playing in the streets provided lively activity for young and old alike. Outside his home, Matona was forming small groups of children, and even making up instruments:

I formed a small group in my town, Kinvale, with some fellow children. So, I make this tin, (...) I cut both sides, and I put rubber. (...) until now it has not existed. But there was very nice sound in that thing. (...) During evening, we didn't have a lot of things to do, children sitting together, and were singing children songs. But for me, it was more. I'd gather my group, and singing **my** father's songs from kidumbak. And the people say: 'Ah! It's like father like son! He's bringing the children and drumming'.

Bilal is not originally from Zanzibar and has therefore had a different upbringing. He has chosen to come to Stone Town and perform taarab, rather than having been born into the Zanzibari ways.⁴⁷ Nevertheless, he also recollects himself being surrounded by music in his childhood and acquired his wish to play the oud from countless playbacks of the cassettes with Arabic music, which was in his family's possession. So great was his interest to do so, that he seized the first opportunity he found to buy himself an oud and start experimenting.

To grow up in households where music takes an important place is not a self-evident circumstance in Stone Town.⁴⁸ The presence of music in Zanzibari family houses varies in contemporary Stone Town as well as Zanzibar Town as a whole, several households have no music playing. This is similar to what I experienced when I was staying long-term in a Zanzibari Arabic family, included as a family member. The only music that could be heard in the house came from the television set or one of the children's rooms. The parents in the household seldom put the radio on or played records. If music was played it was normally by one of the eldest children, generally Arabic popular music and seldom Zanzibari taarab. The period in which Mariam found herself listening to different styles of taarab music on the radio, was a different time than today. Her family did not own a television and the Zanzibar archipelago was much more isolated than it is today.

Mariam is very clear on the fact that her parents were "very strict" and did not allow any music in the time earmarked homework and schoolbooks. "They wanted us to study" and not "concentrate on music", she says. Her eldest brother, described as strict and conservative, was a violin player in one of the city's two main taarab orchestra, the Nadi Ikhwani Safaa. Although he would occasionally spoil his younger sisters by granting them sweets and clothes, he prohibited them from attending his orchestra's taarab concerts. Mariam's other brother, however, kept a different attitude towards his sisters in that he believed "you have to explore the world". It is a safe assumption that the

⁴⁷ See e.g. Bennet, 1978; Fair, 2001 for descriptions of Zanzibar customs in general.

⁴⁸ S. Said, personal communication, February 1, 2008.

eldest brother felt a greater responsibility for his siblings' formal education than his younger brother. On more than one occasion the younger would secretly buy concert tickets for his sisters and escort them there unknown to the onstage performing brother. The girls were always attending from the upper gallery, wearing a veil *kiZorro*, not to be seen. This *KiZorro*, or "Zorro style", describes wearing the *buibui* headscarf with an additional cloth in front of the face, leaving only the eyes exposed like the mask from the *Zorro* movies.⁴⁹ Today, covering the face like this is only practiced by a small fraction of the women in Stone Town. According to one young woman, it is used (paradoxically enough) either by respectable women who are unwilling to have men looking at their faces, or by prostitutes.⁵⁰ Zainab mentions that some personas covering themselves in this fashion are in fact men trying to avoid recognition on the street. One way or the other; it is difficult to recognize a person inside such attire, as few women wear eye make up during daytime.

5.1.2 Taking interest

Matona, Bilal and Mariam share the following trait: a thorough *interest in music* from childhood. They have preserved and developed their interest, on occasion going against the wishes of their families. All of them point out how interested they were in learning about music from an early age and practising music in their different ways. In the 1950s and 1960s, women's taarab was blossoming with several groups involved in lively competition (Kirkegaard, 1996). Mariam was impressed by the women she saw doing textual improvisation and elaboration on melodic lines in weddings. During the gatherings, she saw that women could actively participate in musical activities, shaping the texts and sentiments to fit the female community.

Both Matona and Mariam kept their interest in taarab at the risk of being discovered, although Mariam points out that her mother was "very understanding" when the sisters were secretly attending taarab concerts. They had to promise to stay together with the middle brother, however, and her mother would urge them not to be seen nor heard: "Do not make noise, go there quietly so that nobody sees you, make sure that all the time you cover your eyes".

⁴⁹ It is likely that the expression came to life after the Zanzibaris acquired television, following the motion picture from 1957 (R. Armstrong, personal communication, February 12, 2009). Kresse (in Simpson and Kresse) (2008:231) refers to the use of the style in Lamu, documented for in the early 1990s and "still observable today". He also refers to the style of *ki-ninja*. Mariam spells the style *kiZorro*.

⁵⁰ A. Said, personal communication, June 20, 2006.

Bilal, Matona and Mariam are *originally self-taught*. Bilal practised and explored the instrument by himself, with recordings of Arabic music and pictures of oud players as his guide and inspiration. At the age of 13 he was able to “buy an oud and start to play, just without any teacher or without any help”. He did not do so in secret but as the supply on instrumental education was meagre in his home village, he was left to his own devices. Matona states that the musician appears when the “access and interest” is there⁵¹; he picked up any instrument he could find and just started practising. He now plays a number of instruments on various levels and says of his debut in his father’s orchestra:

So I was playing, I was his percussion player at this instant. So, every day I was improving, improving and amazing. Then I would become higher than all other. For one, two months, all the other, [there] would be no player.

Matona had not always been welcomed in the orchestra, though. He started his career as a caretaker of instruments but was forbidden to touch the instruments more than necessary. All of what he learnt, he learnt secretly and against others’ instructions.

Though surrounded by musicians he was thus left to secretly practise the instruments as the caretaker of a large taarab orchestra. Like Bilal, he used what he heard and saw as his teacher, and even challenged a prohibition against touching the instruments by practising on them. He says he does not know of any musicians at his age who have started playing by going to school, and he goes on describing how he would sneak the instruments out in order to teach himself to play:

In two, three days I could manage to play one of the famous tunes. And then I said: ‘This, to me, is like accordion, let’s try accordion’. Then I tried accordion, and so I liked that, and... Then I was playing [different old instruments], percussion and accordion. And I was trying this guitar, so until six, seven months I managed to be playing with a real orchestra.

Mariam is the one who states most clearly that she took a particular interest in music despite her parents’ wishes. She has taken up an instrument for the first time as an adult and is now training on the accordion, the qanun and the piano. The qanun is her priority and although she has a tutor in Cairo, she is mostly self-taught. Still, she is first and foremost a taarab composer and lyricist, one of the few female ones in Stone Town and in taarab in general. As a child, she secretly learned the lyrics of taarab songs by keeping them hidden in her book while studying biology:

I just learned all these taarab songs, but on my time. Sometimes I used to like these lyrics, and we [the sisters] put them under the book, and my brother comes and we say: ‘No, no we are reading biology’ [laughs]. While the lyrics is behind the book. You can’t dare to sit down without a book. And if we sit

⁵¹ Cf. Lehmann and Jørgensen, 1997.

and sing, someone had to sit outside on the balcony (...) and say: ‘Ah he’s coming! He’s coming!’ So we fear that some day he’ll open our books and see.

The sisters would quickly erase all traces of the music, sometimes keeping the lyrics hidden under their pillows at night. Mariam relates the fact that she did not receive any formal musical training as a child to the uncompromising attitude of her parents and eldest brother. Her parents wanted their daughters to study above all else. The sisters were among the 60 children to be admitted to secondary school “for the whole of two islands; Zanzibar and Pemba – so it was really tough”. Had she not been Zanzibari, she thinks she would have been a trained musician today:

So I learned these songs, and I think maybe by then, had I been in other countries, I would have started to play music. (...) Because I was interested.

5.1.3 Gender and taarab

In a *traditional* Muslim society, a woman’s place is decided upon by society - consensus being that it primarily is within the family home (Cook, 2000; Abu-Lughod, 1993; 1999.) In Stone Town’s society the women’s position varies as much according to social standing and education as it varies according to religion. It is accepted, and women are even some times encouraged, to take up work.⁵⁵ There are however certain lines of work that are viewed as more respectable than others. Taarab music is not yet one of them. The informants argue that although taking up an instrument is challenging for a young boy, the situation for young girls with a desire to play an instrument is too difficult in comparison. Their foci vary when discussing the role of gender and taarab in contemporary Stone Town, and their differences in age, background and gender contributing to this.

Matona is practically focussed. He opens his answer with the words “you have to come to the problem of ‘why’”, and states that he acknowledges the situation today, where few women are partaking in Stone Town’s instrumental activities. “In ten years you’ll have them”, he says, recognizing the challenges for contemporary female performers:

⁵⁵ Makame (2008:ii) writes about the gender gap in higher education in Zanzibar that female students are “outnumbered by their male counterparts in enrolment and in employment” as well as within the science related fields.

I can see the problem with access, the work to get them the [instrument and teaching]. (...) [it's] hard to start, to do, to work, what they want. (...) No [women] playing taarab music. (...) First woman was, I think, Leyla. She was playing violin. Which was the first woman to touch this, for Zanzibar.

Mariam, on the other hand, approaches the question by recalling episodes of several types. She comments on them to illustrate how the situation used to be, evaluating whether this was good or bad and finally recommending a course of action in contemporary society. Claiming that it may be difficult for young girls to start playing an instrument as most of the instrumental teachers in Stone Town at present are male, Mariam holds the parents' reluctance due to "Zanzibar mentality". Incidents where a male music teacher has been known to take advantage of a female student have been known to happen, she claims. This, sadly, gives the honest male teachers an undeserved bad reputation and causes parents to resist giving their child musical schooling:

The mentality if Zanzibar; how can you leave a beautiful woman, you are stupid! (...) Leave her, you know, without (...) sleeping with her. So...but there are some who are strictly for teaching. There are some of them. There are. [But] we hear these stories. (...) It's not good, because you as a teacher you have to have respect. Somebody come there to learn, don't start playing with her. She could have been a very good accordionist or violinist, but because you start playing with her, you're showing her that you love her, and she forgets about playing. It's not good.

Mariam offers similar views as presented in Adam's (2008) article *Give sex or be blacklisted*. In Adams' article Mariam argues that men "hinder advancement of talented female musicians in many ways", demanding sexual favors in return for promotion. Mariam's statement is confirmed by Matona, who says that it is "difficult to get into [schooling], to trust" and to "have studied with the men". However, getting access is difficult for men as well, as many musicians do not "even teach the men! Their own son even." The shortage of instruments is serious and acceptance into groups or orchestra hard. Mariam, Zainab and Matona all point out the "question of trust" involved for young women to learn an instrument. Stories about teenagers and young women being seduced by male teachers are common. The concept of professionalism (i.e. professionalism understood in light of European conditions) is not yet widespread in Stone Town. Many parents are reluctant when a young daughter wishes for instrumental tutoring, as most of the teachers in Zanzibar at present are male.

Bilal is philosophical in his statements. He reflects on the principals behind the matter at hand, while gently moving in a specific direction. Coming from an Arabic society and Arabic music, he says:

It reminds me [of] the situation in the Arabic world. [The music] in the music orchestras, the music bands, the musical ensembles and the instruments – used to be performed by males. (...) In general, all.

And women could be singers. Only. So if you're gonna – if you think about Umm Kulthum⁵⁶ or one of the big female names in the musical field in the Arabic world, you'll find that all the players and the composers, and the poets as well, are males.

The Zanzibari Muslim society and the Arabic culture share few traits, in his opinion. But the mix of religious and cultural (i.e. musical) influences, with males in control, is something the two societies share. Although the situation has changed slightly in the last few years, he thinks the roles that require creativity are “taken by the men”, while women stay at home. Both Zanzibar and the Arabic world are the males' community. Bilal has spoken to several Zanzibari men who do not think that women should partake in the taarab scene more than necessary and preferably only with vocal contributions. Men of all ages voice this opinion in public. Bilal disagrees with this view, and would like to see more women in the orchestra. Through his work as a teacher at DCMA he has tried to influence men in that direction:

Well, if we're talking about an ensemble or orchestra. Imagine that some woman sitting and playing the instruments could add and contribute to the sound – more things and more beauty [in a way] that we didn't expect, or we didn't think about before. And we didn't know how it was gonna be. I'm sure that – and it's normal to think in this way – that the men have some things, and the women have other things – as other abilities. So I think that this miss of this mix, that we're missing this mix....it's something we're really missing. We need it.

Zainab's focus is mainly on her dreams and her thoughts for the future. She claims she gets mentally strong from practising the accordion. It is hard for women to play instruments, because women will always feel that domestic responsibilities take precedence over other wishes. Nevertheless, she argues that women “from different countries are different” and that every woman has “different thoughts”. She herself has always wanted to play and to be a role model for young girls, no matter how difficult it may be:

I want women to...follow me. To be like me, to play like me. And to follow something also of my life.

Is the question of a small number of female instrumentalists a religious one as well as a cultural and traditional one? Both Zainab and Matona denies this, and suggest that as the taarab orchestra were opened to women post-revolution in the 1960s, the fiercest objections did not come from religious leaders. The leaders of the orchestra, however, argued that the Zanzibari men no longer would be able to concentrate on the music working with female musicians (Topp 1992). This is contradictory, however, as women have been taarab vocalists at the centre of attention since Siti binti Saad started

⁵⁶ Umm Kulthum, known as “the voice of Egypt”, pioneered female singers in a society, which discouraged female musical performers (Danielson, 1997).

performing in the 1920s. Zainab claims the controversy surrounding female taarab performers and religion is not an issue in the contemporary society:

You know, not now! But long, long time. But not now. Now is very different. Now they're changing. (...) So, it's a long time when women play and women be like covered up. Now, it's different. Now, they may be seen. And for me, I don't like *buibui* (....) if you try and sing with *buibui*, it's not good. With the eyes, and the....so some people say that no we don't want that. So no playing or singing with that. When she [put on] the *buibui*, then no. When singing you need to look at [her].

Matona finds that it must be difficult for women to get access to tutoring and to the instruments, as they have to go against long traditions (cf. Racy, 2003) and says it “takes adventure” to take up an instrument in the Zanzibari society, even for a man. Bilal agrees with this description and says that “women have a point; they couldn't break out” of the system. He argues that women have difficulties with reaching a high technical level: “Could be religion, could be society, could be the men”. Bilal thus opens up for religion as a contributing cause to the low number of female instrumentalists. All four agree that women are not *encouraged* to take up an instrument. As a child, Mariam was directly discouraged from playing the accordion by one of her (musician) brother's friends. The man informed her that she could have been a good musician as she had rhythm and a good ear but that playing was out of the question. When Mariam asked why, the reply was “for girls, it is not good”. She proposes this meant that she would have breasts as an adult and that the accordion would not fit her. This might not be the truth, as she never had a direct answer from the man; “in those days you couldn't tell directly”, she says. To give women instrumental schooling is simply not done and not at all common, according to Mariam – and Bilal and Matona agrees with this.

5.2 Learning

When a potential musician has gained access to musical training, the *learning* situation he or she is facing varies. Knowledge is transmitted differently within cultural contexts and different institutions, and may change over time. Moreover, Stone Town has a number of traditions as regards the exercising and practising of music, which influence potential and existing musicians. In the second core category, the informants elaborate on the topics of knowledge transmission and practise traditions.

5.2.1 Knowledge transmission

Both Matona and Bilal started playing by methods they call ‘learning by doing’ and ‘learning by looking’, in that they started to explore their respective instrument by

copying other people visually and auditory. In Mariam's case, there is also 'learning by listening', as she would attend concerts and listen to taarab music on the radio. Only Zainab started her musical training with tutoring and classes at DCMA.

As his father's favourite child, Matona was brought along to rehearsals and advanced to instrument caretaker later on, before he was allowed to play in the group. Matona describes this development as something in between luck ("the percussionist had to go") and talent ("every day I was improving and amazing"). He shows great musical talent by sitting down with different instruments and teaching himself the basic technique and a song in a few days. He also displays a certain disregard for rules, as he systematically snatches one instrument after the other and locks it and him inside a room to figure it out:

(...) I got an old violin, 'twas a local violin for 200.000 Tsh. And I was trying to play (...). Then Mohamed Ilyasi saw me, he came to join the group to play at a performance together. And he talked to someone, and said: 'Please tell the boy to come to my group and take him to Europe.' And [someone] said: 'Ah! Mohamed Ilyas, professor Ilyas wants *you* to join his group and in two week's time to take you to Europe!' I said: 'Europe!' And I thought: 'That sounds cool!' Then, I tried at the group and then I went to Europe with Mohamed Ilyas. (...) So then, I started learning *qanun* and violin at once...in secret! Always I'm learning in secret.

Whether his absence went unnoticed he does not say. When the director of the orchestra (first his father, then Mohamed Ilyas) needed a musician and it turned out that Matona could play, all was forgotten and he was on equal footing with the other musicians:

(...) the players will say: 'Ah! Matona is playing violin really well!' And Mohamed Ilyas: 'Ah! You play very well! Play a little more!' Then, I play, and he say: 'Now you're playing violin.' So I was playing violin. (...) And one day (...) Mariam said: 'Matona didn't know how to play', (because I wasn't allowed to touch any of the instruments), 'but [now] he is playing *qanun*!' Mohamed Ilyas said: 'Today, you are going to play *qanun*!' And suddenly I was his *qanun* player.

He used the directors, the fellow musicians and the instruments as his masters or teachers, and as his formal education began, he gained theoretical knowledge as well. The apprentice thus becomes the teacher (although he will never teach his "original masters", i.e. his father and Mohamed Ilyas).

The informants share the fact that they encountered *role models* early on. As children and teenagers, each saw or was in contact with adults, whom they could identify and admire. Mariam enthusiastically recollects how she escorted her older sister to a wedding and first encountered the women's society that existed there. She saw "lots of ladies, so beautiful with black hair combed so nicely":

They (...) used the music of Arabic poets, or an Indian song. (...) Because at these wedding there were lots of people, only wedding[guests], very nicely dressed. And with make up, so these women were very beautiful! But when you see her during daytime, covering herself, without make up, as if she was an old

sink! [laughs] And then she would sing in the evening. I was so impressed how she could sing! And think so fast and sudden like that.

She says that although the ladies were beautiful and nicely dressed, what she “really enjoyed” was their singing. They would play a musical game of turn taking, where one could sing ‘I am beautiful’ and the other would answer ‘I am intelligent’, all the while maintaining dignity and politeness. This musical interaction can be found in the modern taarab of contemporary Stone Town, although in much harsher forms (Khamis 2004a; 2004b). According to Mariam, modern taarab is both tactless and abusive and holds nothing of the grace of ideal taarab. She claims that it was from these all-female events she got her first inspiration to write taarab lyrics herself. After witnessing the happenings a number of times, her admiration for the women’s wit as well as beauty grew:

And the thing that I realized, was that women were very intelligent, and they were very good makers of lyrics. It just came and came and they could sing! It just came, the music...and then **she** answers and **she** answers and **she** answers! And all the lyrics are different from European, always have to have the same end. (...) So, you can think how can she do this? So I used to be very much impressed!

Bilal describes how he listened to his recordings of Arabic music so many times that he nearly wore the tapes out. Even today he has the renowned Simon Shaheen, oud and violin virtuous, as one of his ideals. He says that he “decided to start studying and to take music as a profession” at the age of sixteen. After high school, he applied and was accepted to the Hebrew University in Jerusalem and here he met teachers who further inspired him.

Matona admired his father, a famous musician who introduced a form of taarab to mainland Tanzania. He refers many times to the fact that his father eventually did not want anybody but his son to perform with his group. Matona recalls one incident in particular: During a wedding, there was a percussion player who was complaining and wanted to go home. Matona’s father let the player go and after some hours agreed to his son playing instead. Matona remembers this as the first time he was an accepted member of the orchestra, and says: “He didn’t give the other [his job] back, so the next day, he took me. (...) I was his percussion player and very good and everyone [else] he did not accept”.

5.2.2 Practice traditions

Both Zainab and Matona count the orchestra practice as the real taarab practice. Although it is important to spend time alone with the instrument to improve one’s technical skills, they consider the ensemble practice a requisite in taarab. Mariam says:

You have to have practise [with the orchestra]. Without that how can you play alone? It's not easy. And alone how do you get the instrument? So it's the club, if the club doesn't give the chance to play, you cannot. It's not possible.

Matona and Zainab play many instruments and both see the frequent concert situations as a rehearsal opportunity. Zainab claims to get strong (both physically and mentally) from practising and so does Bilal, while Matona is more in favour of making the most of his existing skills. However, Matona partakes in so many concerts and rehearsals that he is likely to benefit technically. When Zainab is rehearsing with the Culture Music Club up to five nights a week, the rehearsals are open to the public and often have the air of a concert:

(...) we [practise] Monday till Friday, every night. (...) So Monday, you will have concert. Maybe I play, but sometimes we have (...) many members in the orchestra and the place is very small. Some will go, but not all. Not everybody plays. I don't know [if I'm playing], maybe. I'm not sure. Maybe I play. Director [decides]. We have many musicians, so... (...) some will play next time.

The three instrumentalists are all frustrated by what they see as a lazy attitude in people who come to DCMA to learn an instrument. According to Zainab, several beginners give up too easily because they think practising is too much work and too demanding:

Some come and after three months, they...they think music is very simple. They come, and they think music is very simple. It's not very simple. *Msiki si raisi sana*, music is not very simple at all. You need a lot of technique and a lot of heart and feeling. A lot. *Msiki si raisi kama* [music isn't easy like] anything else.

Matona claims that several parents who pay the entrance fee of TZS 10.000⁵⁸ returns some month later and have complaints:

'10.000 for this [playing an instrument] is not easy, but difficult!' So when they have to pay 10.000, no! I was always listening to them (...) even if they don't pay. In five month he or she will have 'something'; she will want [to continue] because she already has 'something'. But in two months – [they are] stopping – pf! (...) This mind, I don't know. (...) This mentality...

Zainab and Matona agree that young musicians and their parents are unfamiliar with the amount of practice required to play an instrument. Matona is discouraged over the fact that certain parents expect what he sees as unrealistic technical skills in a few months, and argues that 10.000 TZS is a reasonable price to pay for a musical education. Bilal agrees that there are a few students who expect too much of their teachers and are unwilling to put in much practice themselves. The "level of performance" is low, he says. However, several students are diligent and he finds that there is "a lot of feeling" as well as discipline in Zanzibari taarab.

⁵⁸ Almost 8 USD. 1 USD = 1305 TZS (Tanzanian Shillings). Retrieved February 4, 2009 from www.xe.com/ucc.

5.3 Continuing

The third category describes the informants' views on factors influencing *continued* taarab performance: practical aspects, identity and social belonging, and the individual's motivation. Staying on the taarab scene as a professional musician involves challenges such as juggling the practical circumstances of practising the profession in every day life and making enough money to support a family. There are also positive aspects of being a taarab musician, the security net traditionally provided by taarab orchestra being one of them. Many musicians have a sense of belonging to their taarab groups.

5.3.1 Practicalities

Matona spends nearly every night away from home in order to play in the many restaurants and hotels on Zanzibar. He claims that "you have to be a rebel" to chose music as a way of life in a society that traditionally has seen music as respectable only when practiced on an amateur level.

Matona and Zainab have several views on the life situation of professional musicians and the challenges these are facing. Bilal, who is unmarried and has no children and Mariam, who has no small children and a husband who is involved in music as well, are not so occupied with the practicalities of music as a profession. They are not oblivious of the dilemmas facing a musician and other night time workers. But as they are not directly responsible for a family they make little mention of it. Bilal is a Palestinian oud teacher at DCMA and not a Zanzibari citizen. Although he has spent a lot of time on the island, he is far from identifying himself with its population. On the contrary, he claims he is viewing the community more and more "from the outside" as time passes by.

Matona, however, has a large family and several children. He clearly states that staying away from home at night playing "in all the clubs" is a problem to him. As his wife looks after the children at night, he is able to get away from home in order to practise his profession, although they both agree it is far from an ideal situation. The majority of the male musicians in Stone Town are married and few see it as problematic to spend much time away from home, as family maintenance traditionally is the women's area. Matona doubts whether a female musician's husband would accept a situation where his wife spent much time away from the family. He agrees with his wife, however,

that spending much time away from home is not an ideal situation regardless of gender. But although he would like to spend more time at home, he would never give up the music.

Zainab states that women in taarab face different practical challenges than men. She will always feel drawn between her job and the family at home and has to handle both her own sense of duty as well as the expectations of others:

[Women] want to find something, to build a life with a man. (...) But it's very difficult [to play]. Because at home, she need to *weweminis am toto* [to bring up the children]. When are you going to go to class, you always feel like 'I need to take care of my child'.

As long as a musician earns money and is able to support a family, both Matona and Zainab agree that there is "no problem" in staying away. Neither Matona nor Zainab would give up music for anything at all:

For me it's no problem, because [if] I found some money to give [my family], then it's ok. Music is everything, music is. You get some money, you study, you study music. So music is everything.

Matona points out that it is not customary for a woman to travel too much alone, especially not at night. He is concerned that a woman would be subject to undignified treatment from fellow male passengers and refers to a comment made by his colleague:

You know Abdallah? He's a qanun player, and he always says that: '[To] always go alone, women could not do this. It's not changing, you know, the life. It's difficult, the life situation for many.'

Zainab, on the other hand, does not worry about this aspect of a musician's life. When presented to the problem, she dismisses it with a wave of her hand. What occupies her more is what relationship a female musician can maintain with the man she is married to, or seeing. She claims that having a Zanzibari boyfriend is demanding; in her current situation too demanding. To spend her energy talking on the phone with him and lose the focus she needs for practising is something she does not want. For this reason she is determined to stay single until she has completed her education. She was single at the time of the interview, and offers harsh judgements about men in general:

We need someone who understand us. Some do. But only the good ones. The rest don't really want love, they're lying. They lie.

Zainab recommends that women should be sincere with their potential husbands and provide detailed descriptions of their future work situation and its implications. Then, perhaps, women can avoid situations where they "sleep with their boyfriends", get confused and tend to lose the sense of their own will and wishes:

Some women sleep with men. And men are men. They like women to work, like to manage women. They don't like if man and women are like [equal]. Men like to be strong.

Matona's worries also take more of an economical direction. He worries that all Zanzibaris are struggling because of changed living conditions. As parts of the population now care increasingly more about having a nice car and a nice house, he is worried what the "craving for European ways" does to the situation for professional musicians in Stone Town and their life situation in general.

5.3.2 Identity and social belonging

For the young Matona, the taarab orchestra and its surroundings held a great attraction, both socially and musically. He saw his father perform and socialize in the orchestra, and spent much of his childhood in taarab rehearsals:

(...) around [me being] two years he used to take me to kidumbak practice, 'cause always he was performing kidumbak; he had many jobs. (...) Then for a long time, while I was growing, he'd take me to the kidumbak. (...) and this my mother told me: he started to give me, only from I was five, (...) shake, or drum, tam – always I was drumming. Around, I don't know, eleven – nine, I remember going with him. To the kidumbak. And see people playing. I tried some time in the break, try to catch things.

Ruud (1997:5), discussing the concept of identity, points out that there is no consensus within literature on how to define 'identity'. He describes both a concept of identity which alludes to an individual's "unique combination of personal characteristic" as well as identity as a more "experimental side of self-awareness"; an "inner" identity. The latter description of the concept may also describe "dimensions within the personality, or traits which distinguish people". Amongst the male members of the long-established taarab orchestra, membership is seen as a distinguishing quality, a fellowship and a marked trait in a person's public identity. For the full time musicians in contemporary Stone Town the identity as 'musician' and 'professional' are inner as well as exterior traits; Matona views himself as a professional taarab musician above all else. This is consonant with Kirkegaard's (2007) statement that "music is inseparable from human action". She writes that sound is always present where people meet to "manifest and highlight their views"; it is identity making. Meanings and identities are negotiated within the active field of understanding that is the musical performance, Kirkegaard (Ibid.) writes. In ideal taarab, social identity is related to the social and musical belonging in an orchestra or group; through the 'togetherness' in the performance the individuals makes use of the musical context to negotiate their identities by a turn-taking of performing and listening. Until the 1964 revolution, the male members of the taarab orchestra had a personal identity as well; they belonged to a *male* musical and social community. To be a member of an orchestra was to belong in a males' community. With

the politically implemented opening of the taarab orchestra subsequent to the revolution (Topp, 1992; Fair, 2001), the situation changed. When women were allowed to join the all-male orchestra, the male members' social identity no longer belonged with the orchestra itself. It may seem as the identity of the professional taarab musicians on the contemporary scene lies more in their individual instruments than in the orchestra or groups. Playing an instrument is still primarily viewed as a male occupation and all men who sing also play an instrument.

Mariam refers to the former women's taarab groups, where women would assist each other beyond musical activities – be it help with wedding- or funeral arrangement, or simply finding a babysitter. The women identified themselves with their group as the members of Nadi Ikhwani Safaa or Culture Music Club do today. When they were active and numerous, there was competition between them, remembered by Mariam as “lively”, “good” and “fun”. The women who belonged to the women's communities had perhaps an even stronger sense of social belonging than the men, as they actively helped each other on a daily basis (Topp, 1992). Mariam argues that one of the most fortunate aspects of the women's taarab groups was that the clubs functioned as social networks as well as musical clubs. The women in the respective groups provided each other with social security as well as helping with practicalities:

If I'm a woman and I'm a member of a group, I will not take anything except the group I'm a member of. (...) The women style was special, and they help each other. Not only with the music, but if there was a wedding, a funeral, they go there together. They contribute, and give their members something. These women groups were very important.

5.3.3 Motivation

Matona is the only informant that mentions the effects of tourism directly, and then in relation to motivational factors of performing taarab. The three other deal with the topic indirectly. Matona points out that the growing tourism has few benefits for Zanzibari musicians:

It's not changing, you know, the life. It's difficult, the life situation for many. People...tend to look the other way, and we feel the situation.

He describes the hard conditions for professional musicians in Stone Town as well as his own ambivalence towards leaving his family every night. The development presents the musicians with challenges such as finding motivation for the many jobs they have to accept in order to earn enough to support a family.

Mariam recalls episodes where she has been subject to prejudice as a female composer and suggests that the women's situation in taarab gives cause for concern. Part of her motivation to keep composing and work on her musical skills is the wish to be a good example for other women, in other words to show her "sisters" that a musical career is doable. Bilal finds it strenuous to trust the Zanzibaris and thinks many have a different sense of manners, *ādāb*, than he has. He still wants to stay on the taarab scene in order to bring some manners to the scene and be a "respectful individual". Zainab is tough in her judgement of Zanzibari men and speaks from experience. She finds it hard to assert herself in the taarab orchestra and claims she has to be mentally strong to make it as a female musician.

In spite of the challenges it presents, all four informants choose to stay on the taarab scene and perform taarab in different ways. Naturally, their reasons for doing so vary a lot. Zainab wants to be a role model and a teacher for young people and says that "I enjoy that part of [playing] – I want women to follow me. To be like me, to play like me. And to follow something also of my life." She appreciates the thought that women are different from one another and that women abroad have as diverse opinions as Zanzibari women and wants to communicate this open-mindedness to others:

I want to be a good teacher for children, I want to be a very good musician. [I] also [want] to help more to start studying, from the [whole] world. Women are important for me, I like them playing. [I'd like to help] the women, the children... To play, [and] also to give them some of my ideas [about] how to make [a] life.

Matona started to play because he saw his father and his father's friends do so. He insists he does not know any musicians at his age who have "turned into one" after starting school. On the contrary, he claims that 'the musician' is present in the moment a person has the opportunity to start playing. In his case, that was in the streets as a boy, when he was drumming on empty tins and making instruments out of tires and pans. He says of his work as a teacher:

I was teaching there because of love for the music and especially [love for] people who want to study.

He has already taught several of his children to play the drums, percussion and violin and is one of the most devoted teachers in Stone Town. Matona has several groups and bands in addition to partaking in Culture Music Club and Nadi Ikhwani Safaa.

Bilal refers to the "feeling" of taarab and the importance of good technique as a means to enhance the interpretation of the music. He says that Stone Town needs people who can "live the place" and see behind any poor technique and "feel and be close".

Many Zanzibaris sing and play without reflecting on the technical level the way European scholars are taught, and Bilal views this as beautiful “because it comes out in a spontaneous way”. He refers to the moment he wanted to be a musician and his own encounter with Arabic music. He started with the “feeling” of the music:

I used to listen to classical Arabic music when I was a child, and I loved – I liked – the oud in specific. As a specific instrument I liked the oud. And I thought about that all the time that one I should try one oud and start to play.

As a girl, Mariam was impressed with the grown-up women who improvised lyrics at weddings. Her brother was a musician with Nadi Ikhwani Safaa and her mother used to listen to music and sing along when she was alone. As a result, Mariam developed a lasting interest in the performance of taarab and its lyrics. Like Bilal is absorbed in the feeling of the music, Mariam approaches taarab through her intellect. Her enthusiasm is scholarly and she has much experience from her many years as a radio producer. In recent years, she has picked up several instruments and is occasionally performing the qanun with Bi Kidude. She simply describes her relationship with and enthusiasm for performing taarab as follows:

Because I was interested [in the music from my childhood]. (...) I developed this interest, and I knew a lot of songs.

All four informants express devotion for taarab as a concept (cf. 5.3.2 *Identity and social belonging*). They are motivated by both the social and the musical aspects of taarab and have a dedication to the instruments, styles and traditions involved in the music. Each has his or her characteristic focus, and some must overcome challenges in order to perform; be it expectations of a society or of an individual, the gender roles, a discrepancy in traditional practises or practicalities. Bilal articulates his view on the musicians’ situation:

I have this way in life: I like brave steps. It makes more sense for me, it impresses me more.

To Bilal, taarab is such a brave step. Ultimately, as long as the performance is heartfelt it does not matter to him whether the technical level is low or not.

5.4. Challenges

The fourth core category describes *challenges* on the ideal taarab scene in contemporary Stone Town. It relates the informants’ views on misunderstandings and disagreements arising from religious beliefs, the growing generation gap with regards to pedagogy and views on taarab as musical style, and challenges faced by female performers.

5.4.1. Religion

Bilal talks about the misunderstandings that may arise from, in his opinion, wrong interpretations of religion and how these may lead to too hasty prohibitions in e.g. musical practices. He is concerned that whenever people try and implement rules from Islam in a society, they might misinterpret the Qur'an and cause unnecessary harm. Bilal is a well read Muslim, and is advocating thorough dialogue and discussion before any rules are implemented in a society:

It's not a pure religious constitution of rules. Well, it will be a big concern to go and to find and to discuss the reasons. But one of the things I can say right now, is that the people think that the Islam somehow give the men [grounds to] to control. Well, I my opinion it's big issue. That if you gonna find you should go and study, and search to find the correct, or the right words. From the religion.

He furthermore argues that Islam consists of both what he calls "religious rules" and "other rules", and that the two kinds should not be mixed up. One of the misunderstandings that have gained too much ground throughout the centuries is, in his opinion, the notion of men as rulers and women as subordinates. Bilal claims this phenomenon needs restudying to make sure the Qur'an is applied in a proper and accurate way. A way befitting the world today with its increasing globalization and not centuries ago.⁶⁰

He also observes that he has trouble trusting many Zanzibaris, as he feels they cannot always be trusted with "serious missions":

(...) according to Islam rules you have to be a serious person that I can trust, that I can rely on. I found, personally, some difficulties with making friends and having real friends – and relationships with girls and things like that. Which made me understand the cultural more, and [through it I] found these differences as well.

Zainab claims that the religious restrictions are looser than before, as e.g. the way Mariam and her sisters had to cover their faces to listen to taarab concerts is no longer common practice. There are no problems with a women standing in front of a crowd and performing. Since the *buibui* complicates reading the singer's expressions and feelings for the audience, it is better to perform without it, Zainab argues. She continues by saying that performing taarab for a woman is "very hard some times". Although the official view is positive towards female performers, the notion of female musicians meets practical obstacles as well as going against deep-rooted patterns in peoples' minds. Husbands faced with the possibility of their wives pursuing a musical career, be it as a singer or an instrumentalist, are reluctant or opposed towards the idea more often than

⁶⁰ The term globalization is used in this thesis as relating to global interconnectedness and the cultural and exchanges that occur for musicians, their music and its consumers (Post, 2006).

not. Although the big clubs were officially opened to female members following the 1964 revolution (Fair, 2001; Topp, 1992), there are still few women performing, and Zainab is the only instrumentalist. “Many people, especially men, don’t want women to know how to play a musical instrument”, she says.

Matona agrees that whatever the challenges for women performers may be in contemporary Stone Town, they should not be religiously founded. He, like Zainab, sees no problems with a woman being on stage to perform, sing or play, and says that “I don’t see the problem with similar treatment” of men and women.⁶¹ Like Bilal, he thinks conflicts that arise are due mainly to misunderstandings between people. He is convinced that some parents, who are unwilling to give their children musical training on grounds of religious restrictions, in fact are unfamiliar with the context:

No, it’s not only about the mother, or the parents, but problems happening, and misunderstandings. (...) they want to start, and maybe they start, and it’s not normal [for the parents]. So they are afraid of what will happen. And (...) if some woman is known to be very easy to be seduced (and it’s known it has happened). So most [incidents] have happened like that, that is why they’re afraid!

Mariam recalls a time when she worked at the radio and broadcasting station, when she was in charge of picking out songs. Owing to a wave of conservatives in Zanzibar and president Abeid Karume’s newly implemented regime rules in the 1960s and 1970s (Graebner, 2004), Mariam faced a prohibition against playing love songs on the radio.⁶² However, she solved the problem by playing songs that talked about love indirectly and in metaphors (cf. 6.2.1; Khamis, 2004a; Racy, 2003):

I was not allowed to use the love songs, there was a time... But still, I knew how to select my songs. I selected songs that talked about love, but not in a direct way.

5.4.3. Generation gap

Taarab musicians in contemporary Stone Town have different ideas of ideal behaviour for respectable musicians. The differences tend to be consonant with a generation gap between younger performers and older musicians.

The notion of professionalism is central to many discussions on how to perform taarab in Stone Town today. There are different understandings of the word and several

⁶¹ Women’s rights movements in Africa have traditionally not been fighting for women’s right to artistic expressions as well as e.g. equality in workload and marriage. Walters (2005:125) writes on feminism in Africa that it is “heterosexual, pronatal and concerned with ‘bread and butter issues’”. Matona’s opinion is not common among Zanzibari men outside the musical community.

⁶² Subsequent the 1964 revolution, when the former Tanganyika merged with the newly independent Zanzibar and became the United Republic of Tanzania, taarab came under suspicion. The music was seen as “a purveyor of bourgeois mentality”, as it had been the music of the middle class, i.e. the Arabs (Graebner 2004:187). The following collectivization of the taarab clubs was implemented under the guidance of Ministry of Culture and its respective party branches. Many taarab records and tapes were destroyed at the national radio station in the years to follow (Ibid.).

simply apply it on a musician who has advanced technical skills on a certain instrument as well as a thorough understanding of the music. Mariam illustrates this in her statement about a common friend by referring to a recording she and I both took part in together with several other musicians:

Yes, [he's] a musician, who plays many songs [and instruments]. Then there's only one or two which he plays very well. Or three, but not more. The rest he plays – but when it comes to professionalism he can't have all of them.

Zainab has met this argument several times but claims that it represents no challenges for her, as she is certain she will always be able to support a family with her music, be it through teaching or performing. Matona claims that life is economically hard for a musician but reflects no further on the question of professionalism as a concept. This may stem from his being the only son of one of the first full time musicians in Zanzibar. After all, he grew up with a father who made all his money from music and succeeded in supporting a large family. Mariam has always worked with the media, and has divided her time between working as a producer and board member on several boards, and composing music. To Bilal, the concept of amateurism versus professionalism can be compared more to a European musician, as he has taken part in a formalized educational system for many years and already has experienced music as a means of making some money and travelling the world.

The traditional notion of Zanzibari musicians has been that he should have an education in order to be respectable. Mariam admires this:

I always gave them the example of the late Seif Salim. Seif Salim is one of the artists who studied. He had master's degree. (...) And he was a very good instrumentalist. But people respected him because he had his job and he was playing music.

Mariam points out that there was very little money to be made from playing taarab only three decades ago, i.e. before DCMA was founded and perhaps more importantly, before the proliferation of tourism on the island. Her view is that having music as a career path in contemporary Zanzibar is held in quite high esteem, as several of the musicians in contemporary Stone Town have close ties to the tourism industry. Tourism is now creating several of the highest incomes on the island and much emphasis is given to earning money in Stone Town. Therefore, activities and individuals connected to it are generally rewarded with a high status. But, Mariam states, education is a deciding factor. If a person has an education, be it in music or otherwise, he or she may follow nearly whatever career path desired.

Both Matona and Bilal reflect on this tradition, and have slightly different points of view. Matona, who have grown up in this context, sees few challenges and claims that the good student ultimately will grasp the concepts. Even so, he acknowledges that Bilal feels that this way of teaching is partly to blame for the “low technical level” of the musicians in the orchestra.

The current teachers of DCMA face challenges in trying to combine their own musical training, which often has taken place in a taarab orchestra through apprenticeship, with the teaching in groups at the music academy. As it is impossible for the teacher to pay attention to all instruments at all times, the ‘*tena* pedagogy’⁶³ (Madsen, D., 2007:82) sometimes becomes the easiest solution. Mariam has few views on the pedagogical conflict, although she is aware of it. She has, however, little experience with teaching herself.

5.4.4. Female performers

Mariam wants women to be able to play instruments in taarab, and is determined to be the first woman instrumentalist.⁶⁴ However, there is an active female instrumentalist in a taarab orchestra already: Zainab is, per se, the only female performing member. She plays the accordion with Culture Music Club and practises with the orchestra nearly every night. When the orchestra is scheduled to leave town e.g. on tour, however, she is left behind for varying reasons. She has fought hard to earn a place in the orchestra in the first place, and is afraid that she will be treated differently than the young men in the future.

According to Mariam, the period when the women’s groups were active was a good time for her gender. She claims that although the orchestra opened up to female members in 1964, there is still severe remaining resistance to female instrumentalists within them. Topp (1992) refers to several male members of the orchestra who claim that the reason for keeping females out of the orchestra was founded on a belief that the women would distract the male members from performing the music properly. Mariam says the following about female instrumentalists:

I wish women could play, because if they could play, they would start their own organisation and women’s club. It wasn’t bad in those days, because women had their own groups. But the same women who were singing in the women’s groups, they were also singing in the men’s groups. But there is a competition, because if there is a women group, all the weddings will go to the women.

⁶³ Madsen, D., introduces the term ‘*tena* pedagogy’ in his thesis on taarab and tourism. The word *tena*, meaning ‘again’, is much used word during rehearsal situations (cf. 6.2.1 on the pedagogical discussion taking place in contemporary Stone Town).

⁶⁴ R. Armstrong, personal communication, January 14, 2009.

The women's taarab groups described by Topp (1992) were musical and social clubs and had a function not unlike the main (at that time) all-male orchestra. The groups employed men to play, while the women would sing, dance, compose and improvise lyrical stanzas. Mariam would clearly have liked these groups to return so women could once again have an autonomous social and musical network. She is cautiously optimistic of what effect DCMA might have in the long run:

But now, we'll see what will happen. Maybe the music academy will restart this, because if they train more women, then women start playing for these women's groups. (...) 'Cause they have less time, you know.

Zainab has strongly felt the expectations of Zanzibari society more than most people, seeing as she is the only female performing taarab instrumentalist. Her statements are two-sided. On one hand, she maintains that the situation makes her strong and that she is enjoying the pressure of practice because she loves the music. She is proud to be a role model for other women, and especially the young girls who come to learn an instrument at DCMA. There is no need for a boyfriend or even a husband as such a situation only takes focus away from the music. On the other hand, at the beginning of 2009 she had found a man who she hoped to stay together with. It is nice to have someone to come home to, she says, even though a man might want to "manage" her, as Zanzibari men "like to be strong". Most men are not to be trusted, she maintains, as they say one thing before the wedding and another after. Full openness is therefore the best solution. She believes a woman has to sit down with her boyfriend and "share our hopes", not necessarily on the first date, but early on in the relationship. She is confident, however, that there are good men in Zanzibar, men who might understand how to be with a female instrumentalist. Thus, she claims there are good prospects for female musicians in Stone Town.

Both Zainab and Mariam urge women to study in order to get respect within the musical community as well as in society in general. When a young woman is educated, either in music or something else, she can hold her head high in the orchestra and answer none of the comments about her "beautiful eyes" or "beautiful figure". When she has food on the table, enough money, a job and an education, she will know that such praises is not the point, Mariam argues. Many Zanzibari women only have primary education. The salary is very low, and Mariam claims that many compensate for this by dressing up and "going for people with money"⁶⁵:

⁶⁵ Cf. Leonard, 2007.

So if you don't have a good education, as a woman and you enter music, it means you want men to sleep with you. You don't want respect. But if you are educated, you have your good job, you can sing, you can play, nobody will dare do anything.

Zainab argues in a similar way and states that she wants women to be like her and to play like her; she hopes that she can be one of those women who have studied and have earned the respect of the Zanzibari society.

It is problematic for women to get access to the orchestra, Mariam claims. She remembers several cases of young and talented women who were admitted to the orchestra. Shortly afterwards, however, they all quit their instruments and took up singing in the choir with the other women instead:

Even now, most of them who play any instruments they are men. (...) even if you find a women playing music, I don't know, they have a way of convincing her to leave the instrument. Because I remember, there was a woman who was a member of Ikhwani Safaa. She had studied music from these youth groups (...) she was playing the violin already. And I went to see her, she was playing in one of the shows and I was so happy, she was sitting there in this black dress, so beautiful and she was playing this violin. After a few months I saw her singing, and I saw 'Ah this is the end of it'. And I went to these people and I blamed them and said 'why isn't she playing'. And they said 'ah, no, it's not...she wanted to sing'. And I said 'it's not a question of singing! She came as a violin player, you have to teach her, to improve her technique! She has to be improved, not be convinced to start singing and to think that when people stand in front and dance and that that is good singing'.

Bilal thinks "men have some [qualities] and women have some [qualities]" and it would be a shame to "miss the mix" of what the two genders may contribute to in music when they play together. Neither of the four knows any women today who perform taarab music at a high level, with the exception of Zainab. Although she undeniably is on a high level and performs with the Culture Music Club, it is difficult to get an understanding of her individual technical level, as she rarely play solos. Bilal reflects on the situation for female performers in the city and the challenges they are facing, which he considers difficult to overcome. At the same time he says:

We've got some female students in the music academy. (...) But still, you see Bi Kidude⁶⁶ in Zanzibar, drinking beer and smoking cigarettes. You can relate to the spectre as a picture of freedom and women's rights. And this is quite strange – weird – compared to the situation; compared to the whole picture of the island.

Mariam is one of the few female composers of taarab and has had several experiences where she has had to defend herself. She has encountered people full of prejudice, she says. Especially in her younger years she was frequently answering questions as to whether she had in fact written the songs she claimed to have done. The songs were not pieces of plagiarism, as some people suggested. Likewise, she was facing questions

⁶⁶ Cf. 2.2 *Research subject and questions* or footnote #24.

about why she had married her husband seeing as he came from a less privileged family than her:

But later, they realised that I was very strict and they respected me. I could tell them frankly ‘go to your prostitute, not me. I decided to marry him because I loved him. That’s all. So I’m not a women to sleep with’.

The problems that meet women who apply for membership in the clubs are serious, she continues. There is a “tradition” that few will speak of, which concerns both women and men. Women will have relationships with central men in the different groups and thus are allowed to perform with the group. Women who oppose to this way of choosing performers are simply pushed out, discreetly and quietly:

Even now, you find that women who have been singing more songs than the others or who have been highlighted as the best singers of their groups, have boyfriends in the group. It’s a pity. Or sometimes you find a good voice but she can’t come near because she doesn’t want to sleep with somebody! This is not right. (...) They start praising that you have beautiful eyes, that you have beautiful figure, but it’s not the point. Some good singers run away and the people, who have boyfriends in the club, will be up there. It’s a problem. We loose very good voices.

5.5 Changes

The fifth and final core category aims to outline the informants’ views on the role of DCMA and the taarab orchestra, as well as the *changing* musical scene of Stone Town. The informants reflect on aspects of the development in Zanzibar and the direction in which DCMA is headed, offering their views on action needed to preserve the ideal taarab music.

5.5.1 DCMA and the taarab orchestra

Although both Matona and Bilal see many qualities with the current DCMA, they both find room for improvement and offer constructive criticism. Matona says that the music academy needs new ideas and is optimistic with regards to the current board for the current board. In his opinion, the academy could benefit from cutting back on the rules “like it’s already a big university” and make the students “more like family – like in the beginning”. He refers to the first years in the academy’s history, around 2002-2003, when he claims there were people everywhere and much activity in the hallways and classrooms. In order to deal with the academy’s current challenges, Matona advocates the

use of a local manager as well as “somebody in charge from out[side]” on different projects. His perhaps most pressing concern is that many of the inhabitants of Stone Town have not yet heard about DCMA. He has several ideas on how to change this. They can play and “do PR” at Darajani, the local market as well as handing out flyers in several towns on Unguja, such as Paje, Ngombe and other areas out of town. He repeatedly points out: “All the most talented [violin players] are from out of town (...) from [Pemba] or from the countryside.”

Bilal is concerned about “the way Western money is coming into this country (...) to try and rebuild the culture again”.⁷⁰ He emphasizes that he knows the money is given with good intentions but he is convinced that the time has come to re-evaluate the spending patterns:

(...) our being as a human is complicated in general. And the communication between us is also complicated. Well, I can understand this culture more than people coming from the West. I can feel things going wrong – with good intentions. But it’s going wrong. You need people with open minds, with experience, who can relate to the culture here. Really, they can feel, they can be close. They can enjoy the music, not pretend that they’re enjoying the music. Even if it’s a bad performance, ok? (...) they can get the...how to say that...the diamond that hide.

He argues that there is no point in coming to Stone Town with solely academic ambitions and try to implement Western structures. To tell the Zanzibaris that “this is the right thing to do (and only this)” is a dangerous thing in his opinion, as it could destroy the beautiful and spontaneous elements, which already are in the music. He claims that the taarab music needs people “who can live the place and live the music”, so that all the creativity is coming from Stone Town and not from the outside. “Sorry,” he says, “our culture doesn’t fit your frame.”

The informants agree that DCMA plays an important part in shaping the future cultural life of Stone Town. Zainab is content with the current direction of the academy and apart from wanting more female students she has few objections. For her, the academy constitutes a social and musical network as well as a good place to both learn and teach; she is teaching several young children. She is doing a good job, has had good responses from parents and students alike and is glad to be a part of DCMA.

Mariam states that the academy is doing an important job in educating young men and women but wishes for closer ties between DCMA, the taarab orchestra in Stone Town, and the musical job market in Zanzibar. She wants to reconnect the different generations, and in this way lay the groundwork for an interchange of knowledge

⁷⁰ Several institutions and organizations focussing culture and development (i.a. NORAD and The Peace Corps) invest in Zanzibar and in taarab music.

between young and old musicians. Only through playing often and regularly for real audiences can the musicians improve, she argues:

Like for example, the music academy is teaching women. Whom have you seen who are playing very good? Because they don't get a good chance of playing in their own club. You'll just see in the newspaper that 'this one is very good with the accordion, this one is very good with what and what'. But when you listen to her, she's... (...) You have to have practise!

However, as Zainab points out, performing with the orchestra presents a challenge for future novice performers because the older and more experienced players take precedence over them every time a smaller group is performing:

Maybe I play, but sometimes we have (...) many members in the orchestra and the place is very small. Some will go to, but not all. Not everybody plays.

Matona states that more and more of the musical activity in Stone Town seems to be directed at tourism. He has great hopes for tourism as a way of promoting his music and he is promoting his CDs through a SPA in Stone Town, owned by him and his Dutch wife. This SPA offers beauty treatments of several kinds, henna painting, *khanga* – and taarab. He also has hopes for the future of DCMA and the direction the academy is taking, as he has not been particularly happy in the past:

(...) someone, who is on the board just now, it's Adel (...) he's a musician and it's good. A big help. His idea is a very big help. (...) in a way [the school]'s gone down. (...) But [DCMA's] more likely to attract tourists or people come [from the street](...) [It] should attract the local! But with everything we do, more emphasize should [be] out! Darajani, and different things. (...) Now it's half an hour [for] somebody to come in town, so if you forget Makunduchi....

He thus argues that potential Zanzibari musicians are lost to the academy because the profile of the institution currently is more attractive to tourists. What causes this profile, however, is unclear. However, the fact that DCMA offers Westernly influenced musical training, unlike the main taarab orchestra, may contribute to the academy's appeal to non-Zanzibaris.

Bilal recommends constant revision of the curriculum in order to adapt it to the current needs of the institution. The institution is a young one; the organization was established in the spring term of 2001 with the academy in Stone Town opening the following year. Now seven years old, the academy is no longer in its initial years and the challenges have changed. The academy was the first and is still the only of its kind in Stone Town. The current board's main challenge is in Bilal's opinion to maintain a constantly open mind towards newly introduced ideas. A young institution like DCMA needs to be able to continue adapting in order to prevent deep-rooted patterns from hindering further development:

And always expect that somebody will come and have something new to add to the curriculum and methodology, which could take the field and institution to different directions. It's like science and maths; it [the knowledge] is building up over years and years - and then, suddenly, something new will come out.

5.5.2 Change in the scenery

The informants do not agree on what changes will take place in the performance of the already changing taarab. Mariam has seen several changes in her lifetime, the most dramatic taking place in her adult life. Opening Stone Town and the archipelago to tourists has been changing both the city itself and its inhabitants. The Zanzibaris today are very well informed and several households watch BBC, CCN, Al Jazeera and Euronews on a daily basis.

When speaking about change Mariam recalls many episodes, and she illustrates how times have changed by telling how she and her sister used to sit up on the gallery whenever they secretly attended a taarab performance. The married women would sit downstairs, escorted by their husbands and only slightly less covered than the women upstairs. She also recalls several episodes from weddings. It was uncustomary for unmarried women to attend weddings alone; a younger sister was required to accompany them. The textual improvisation she was so impressed with when she was little has now disappeared from public space and Mariam thinks it a pity that such occasions no longer take place. What caused the end of the women's taarab groups is, Mariam claims, that the women's groups started borrowing songs from the big orchestra. Before that the improvisations were usually carried out on well-known tunes from the Indian popular music. The male musicians who accompanied the singers were the same as the ones who normally played in the big taarab orchestra, seeing as the women themselves never played any melody instrument. The only instruments traditionally played by women were rhythm instruments such as drums and shakes.⁷¹ The male musicians from the taarab orchestra knew the Indian tunes and therefore did not have to practise on beforehand. When the women's groups started to adopt songs from the big taarab orchestra, however, it became "a question of rehearsing", as Mariam puts it. The musicians did not have time to both rehearse with the big orchestra and the women's groups – and the women's groups suffered.

Mariam would like to see women playing instruments, so that they once again could form women's groups. But "even if you find a woman playing music, they have a

⁷¹ This is also true of the contemporary situation, cf. Jones and Mahmoud (2007).

way of convincing her to leave the instrument”. She tells several stories of young, talented women who were playing taarab instruments and who switched to singing when they got to the big orchestra. She worries that this will not change unless DCMA starts to push women more actively into forming women’s groups in the academy.

Matona claims that the people in the taarab orchestra are “kind of selfish really” and that this is something that has remained unchanged through the years. Taarab musicians want to push themselves to the front and promote only their own talents. He too tells stories of young women who came to the orchestra and did not receive any of the training they were promised. He states that:

(...)15 years ago, there was a big move in lifestyle and situation. (...) I don’t know for better or worse, but...it’s a lot of things happening and it made things different... politics change and life change style, now they didn’t want to work, to be or live this way, they want to live the European ways, you see to that your family has a nice car and nice house (...). It’s the change from old system of life system.

He claims it is difficult for the Zanzibaris and that they do not benefit from the growing tourism the way “everyone else” does. As of 2009, he is hoping for a change towards lowered costs of life as a result of the worldwide financial crisis. But as Africa is the least affected continent, he is reluctant to hope for changes on the musical scene in Stone Town. Bilal puts it like this:

[Change] depends of the way of the education that the new generation gets. That will change the mentality in general. Will have over-all effect on the society. And I’m a musician; I’m not really keen on social concerns and subjects. It’s just the way that I’m seeing things.

6.0 DISCUSSION

This thesis focuses the contemporary situation of performing taarab in Stone Town. The discussion addresses the main question: *What is the situation for performing taarab musicians in Stone Town today?* The research question is explored thorough the sub-questions: 1) What circumstances do young musicians face when they want to take up taarab music as a profession? 2) What, if any, challenges do young women encounter in both taking up and instrument and staying in on the taarab scene? 3) How is knowledge about taarab transmitted? 4) What factors influence the performing of already trained taarab musicians in their practicing of the profession? 5) What changes have taken place for performing taarab musicians within the changing society that Stone Town is? 6) What

conflicts are there on the taarab scene, and what processes are developing in contemporary musical Stone Town?

The informants elaborate on the questions above in their statements and views. They have observations that are in harmony with several researchers' notes about the history of Stone Town, the inhabitants of the city, taarab music as a phenomenon and cultural reflection, and the role of women in the Zanzibari society. Although they emphasize different aspects of the problems and naturally have individual points of view, they have a common preoccupation for certain subjects. These subjects form the basis for the categories in chapter 5.0 above, in which the empirical material is sorted. The subjects form a line of questions about the role of the family and of how to gain access to musical knowledge and tutoring. They also aim to give an understanding of the practicalities of performing taarab and traditions concerning several aspects of performing an instrument.

Based on the empirical material in chapter 5.0, the discussion is organized in the following main headings: *Accessing and performing taarab (6.1)*, *Contemporary challenges (6.2)* and *Participation on the musical scene (6.3)*. It is within this framework I understand the contemporary situation of a musical style dating back to the 19th century.

6.1 Accessing and performing taarab

Several factors are of importance when addressing whether or not a young prospective musician is able to get access to musical training. It may seem that the family's circumstances are of great importance. The young musician's interest in music also seems to be a key factor, as well as his or her gender. Several young children train in music but fail to pursue music as a career. What is required is not only to get access to musical training but also stay in training long enough to have a chance of becoming a professional instrumentalist. Factors such as what learning and practice traditions are deeply founded in Stone Town's society seem important in this respect. From this follows the first main heading broken down into three sub-headings: *Getting access*, *Learning by doing* and *Staying in the game*.

6.1.1 Getting access

The musician appears when they have access and interest (...) You have to come to the problem of 'why'.
Because it was difficult for them to get access – they want! Yes, they want. (Matona)

Performing taarab in an African country, or any other country, presupposes the opportunity of getting access to an instrument, an opportunity of listening and

acquainting oneself with music, the milieu surrounding musicians, or to tutoring of various kinds and on different levels. Performing music requires access to knowledge. There are two groups in contemporary Stone Town to be taken into consideration when discussing the accessibility of musical training in taarab. The musicians in contemporary Stone Town can be broadly outlined into two groups. On the one hand, there is a group of young Zanzibaris, who are growing up on the contemporary musical scene. They have witnessed the growing tourism and its effects on the inhabitants, and they are used to watching foreign television and surfing the Internet. Several of these musicians have received their musical training from scratch in DCMA and have never been a member of a taarab orchestra or large taarab group. This group of young musicians has different prospects and opportunities of performing taarab than earlier generations. Several factors influence this group, such as *family background, gender, interest and location*.

On the other hand, there is a generation of older, performing taarab musicians, many of whom are also teachers or tutors for the younger generation. Whether this group can be named as one generation can be debated, as they are of several ages and thus do not fit the description of "all the people living at the same time or of approximately the same age".⁷³ They have, however all witnessed great changes take place in Stone Town, both within the musical scene and the society as a whole. They therefore differ from the Zanzibaris growing up today. Literature also shows the description of a generation as "a stage of technological development or innovation", e.g. "a new generation of computers" (Ibid.:footnote 73). There is, therefore, a generational distinction between the musicians who grew up with the Internet, the synthesizer, modern taarab and perhaps even with tourism, as compared to the older musicians who remember Stone Town as it used to be before the archipelago of Zanzibar was opened to tourists – and 'the global village' made its entry (Nettl, 2005).

This musical circle consists of already educated individuals of several ages, backgrounds and instruments. To be able to understand the drive of this group of musicians, it is necessary to look into their backgrounds and see what descriptions they provide of the changes that have taken place. I have listened to their stories and examined a part of their motivation to perform, as well as their attitudes towards the changing society and market. The factors that are of importance to the potential young musicians' opportunities of acquiring musical knowledge are also of importance to this group. However, as they are educated, their initial way into music has already been determined.

⁷³ *WordNet book* ("lexical database for the English language"), copyright Princeton University, 2006, retrieved August 6, 2008 from <http://wordnet.princeton.edu>.

Their opportunities in the musical circles and their challenges and circumstances in life are thus deciding factors for their everyday lives as performers of taarab.

The opportunities both groups have of acquiring musical knowledge are decisive for their further persuasion of the performing of taarab. Some musicians even seem to belong in both groups: They are young, educated musicians who are comfortable with the society as it is today – and are perhaps unable to remember how it used to be – while at the same time teaching younger children taarab music and partaking in the performing taarab scene in Stone Town.

In order to gain access to an instrument for a child, it is crucial that the family is positively inclined. A child has no problems with learning taarab lyrics and singing along to songs on its own. Mariam demonstrates this when describing how she would memorize songs from the radio saying “you can imagine we children learned songs faster than grown-ups”. She would listen to the radio with her siblings and friends when they were playing outside from 4 pm to 6.15 pm every day. Also, she would practise singing and dancing with her sisters in secret, since the oldest brother and head of family strongly disapproved of this.

To get access to an instrument, however, requires the consent of parents or guardians. Very little has been written about the transmission of musical knowledge within Zanzibari taarab. In fact, before Topp’s dissertation on women in taarab music in 1992, very little research literature had been written on the subject of taarab on the whole. Although several travellers have described Zanzibar, its inhabitants, climate and language as early as the beginning of the 1800s⁷⁴, the work published for Western scholars before the end of the 1980s is minimal. It was not until the last part of the 1980s that tourism made its entry into the archipelago. Before this the population had remained comparatively separated from the influences of the Western world. Its contact with Oman and mainland Africa was a good deal more extensive than with European nations (including the English protectorate) due to the wide-ranging trade (Fair, 2001; Simpson & Kresse, 2008). It was not before the archipelago opened the ferry connection between Dar es Salaam and Stone Town to non-residents that the city became an easily available destination for scholars and tourists alike.⁷⁵

From Mariam and Matona’s statements, we see that their families’ interest in music was decisive for their own interest in and exploration of taarab. Matona was

⁷⁴ Maps and guides of Zanzibar dating back to the 19th century are available e.g. from Reinecke, 1801 and Burton, 1872/1967.

⁷⁵ A. Kirkegaard, personal communication, November 11, 2008.

drumming and singing, Mariam was secretly learning texts and melodies in between her studies. In her Awlad 'Ali Bedouin narratives Abu-Lughod (1993) describes a society, where it is quite common for the members of a tribe to view themselves as members of the community and not first and foremost separated individuals. This sense of belonging and togetherness can also be found in the Zanzibari culture, especially among the older members of the community. Stone Town, like most cities, has traditionally had insufficient governmental health coverage, social security and welfare benefits. As the public welfare arrangements in general have been lacking and the system is a relatively new introduction the African societies, the population considers their family and extended community family their security net; their real social security.⁷⁶ Individuals largely depend on family and neighbours in difficult situations, such as when they need help with the children, the economy, in illness or at work. Additionally, intermarriages take place within the local community. The individual member's opportunities in life therefore typically depend upon being accepted within the local community and approval, and endorsement from other members proves vital to a person's success. This dependence on family is similar to what Abu-Lughod (1993; 1999) describes of close family relations and sense of belonging in the Awlad 'Ali Bedouin community. Going against the public opinion of codes of behaviour would have severe consequences in both societies, not only to the individual in question but also to the individual's family. The codes of behaviour concerning music and musical activities are no exception (Racy, 2003). The family's opinion is important, if not a deciding factor, to the chances of a potential musician receiving musical training.

Music in Zanzibari society has traditionally been seen as a leisurely activity. Racy (2003) and Kirkegaard (1996) writes that several musical contexts traditionally have been *harām*, forbidden, in both traditional Arab society and in the earlier Stone Town. Where Qur'anic chant is held in high esteem, music played for enjoyment alone or commercial purposes are placed on the lowest end of the scale. The Zanzibari society exists at the junction of the East African mainland practices and the Arabic Peninsula. As a result of the extensive trade within the Indian Ocean, several Zanzibaris have ancestors from Oman and Yemen, as well as having family members in the East African mainland. Its habitants can therefore be said to possess to both African and Arab costumes. This duality is evident in several areas of Stone Town, and is expressed in clothing,

⁷⁶ Larsen (2008) writes that most Zanzibaris prefer to denote themselves by referring to *kabila* (locally translation: tribe). *Kabila* may be described as the "social security" network in Zanzibar, as it indicates the extended family network found numerous communities around the world (cf. Post, 2006; Hood, 1982).

architecture, food, language and music. The Islam practiced in Stone Town is in many ways different from the different forms practiced on the Arab peninsula, seeing the practitioners are influenced by the diversity of their ancestors. Moreover, since the city was opened up to tourists, the process of urbanisation through which the world decreases to its inhabitants launched under the name 'global village' (Nettl 2005) has had its effect.

Stone Town was earlier a more closed city, as no *Wazungu* (meaning: white person; foreigner) were admitted onto the ferries from Dar es Salaam to Stone Town.⁷⁷ There are conflicts between young adults and elder members of the society concerning appropriate ethics, clothes, music and lyrics. Madsen (2007) describes how several elders complain about a shift in ethical principals among the younger generation towards a more "Western" way of life as concerns sex, music, attire and religious views.

Matona and Mariam remember being surrounded by music throughout their childhood and claim this was what made it possible for them to pursue music further. They both describe how music used to float out onto the street from radios all over the town. When I first came to Stone Town (in 2004), this was exactly what I experienced. Nearly everywhere, taarab or kidumbak was heard, and several shops and private households inside Stone Town centre would have a radio playing in the background. In contemporary Stone Town, the music floating out from doorways and shops are more often Western pop or rap music than Zanzibari taarab, if there is music at all. Sounds of televisions or no sounds at all are just as common.

In the Stone Town household in which I have lived several times while in Zanzibar, music has only been playing if the television has been on or if one of the daughters in the family has been practicing their dancing well out of sight from any males. However, as the daughters gave me lessons in the dancing they practiced, I realized that Arabic pop music was their preferred music and not Zanzibari taarab. I only came across taarab a few times during my prolonged stays in the family, every time while watching television and stumbling across a recording of a taarab performance. The daughters claimed they liked taarab but said it was unwise to go to the concerts, as there would be males present. These males would join the women on the floor occasionally. To the daughters of the family, raised as Zanzibari Arabs, the presence of a male audience meant that they could not dance, with or without the men on the floor. It was not seen as accepted behaviour from a respectable young woman wearing the *buibui*.

⁷⁷ A. Kirkegaard, personal communication November 11, 2008.

The rules of Stone Town households differ in this respect, and several Zanzibari parents have no problems with their daughters joining the traditional taarab concerts. It may seem that middle class Arabs have more difficulty with exposing their daughters to the general public and have different views on appropriate behaviour than Zanzibaris coming from the mainland or belonging to poorer families. However, this varies greatly. To the family in question, instrumental education for the young daughters was out of the question, as was jeans and walking around without a head cloth of some kind. The reluctance to provide the teenagers with musical education seems to stem as much from the notion that music offered no real future security, than from a conviction of impropriety. All the daughters are currently educating themselves abroad, within finance and economy and not within music.

Whether the fact that the informants were surrounded by music during their childhood was a deciding factor in their moving on to the musical profession can be disputed. Nevertheless, it seems to be an encouraging element to the children of musicians that their parents and role models practice music on a daily basis. Mariam's mother used to listen to recordings whenever she had the time, and so did Bilal in his family.

The informants describe their early and thorough interest for music. Mariam's eldest sister used to take her to weddings, as she was unable to go without being "chaperoned" by a relative or sister. The weddings described by Topp (1992) and Fair (2001) were women-only events and Mariam remembers how she was thoroughly impressed with the ability to improvise good and agile lyrics in the spur of the moment. Influenced by these events as well as listening to music on the radio she took an interest in taarab, and she was also given lessons in singing and dancing by a woman in the neighbourhood. Although Mariam remembers the sweets and money she was given, the songs and ornamentations stayed with her and fuelled her interest. Bilal's interest made him save money for quite a while until he was able to buy an oud. Matona's interest was so strong that he went against his instructions to try out different instruments in secret, although he might have suspected that the punishment would not be too severe. In Stone Town today aspiring musicians can sign up for more or less Western styled tutoring at DCMA. They need their parents' approval, however, as there is an admission fee at the music academy. Matona describes how several parents find the cost too high and refuse to pay more than the initial admission fee. The cost of being a student at DCMA is very low by international standards and quite low compared to the private schools attended by

privileged children. Nevertheless, it seems as though several parents see tutorial fees paid to economical colleges and more traditional educational institutions as more beneficial to their child's future than investing in a musical education.

Performing taarab is also an issue of gender. It may seem that the opportunities of getting access to musical training vary according to gender. In contemporary Stone Town there are hardly any females who play taarab instruments. Throughout history the position of female entertainers has been challenged in Muslim societies (Racy 2003). Women have excelled in singing and, in medieval times, in playing the oud. It has, however, never been customary for women to receive training in any of the melodic instruments in taarab, such as violin, *nay* or *qanun*. Zanzibari women have been playing different kinds of drums and shakes, seemingly to accompany their own or others' singing, but they rarely play melodic solo instruments (Topp, 1992). In traditional Arab society, women are expected to demonstrate the virtue of *hasham*, i.e. propriety and modesty as a voluntary gesture (Abu-Lughod 1986:103ff). This virtue earns them respect in a male dominated society. Hasham is often considered to be incompatible with pursuing a musical career, as the performance of music requires that the musician physically stands in front of an audience demand their attention. One exception to the rule is the renowned Egyptian singer Umm Kulthum who has performed innumerable times with an orchestra and still placed a great deal of significance in this virtue. However, Racy (2003) describes how this singer would cry and be ashamed every time her picture appeared in posters or other marketing material for coming concerts.

In contemporary Stone Town, the concept of hasham is less pronounced, due to changing times as well as different cultural paradigms. However, most women continue to wear the *buibui* or another kind of headscarf in public. Taarab concerts have been the exception to the rule, as they traditionally have *not* been considered public events.⁷⁸ The informants confirm that the use the headscarf on a Zanzibari taarab scene is unnecessary, if not uncustomary, seeing as the women participating in the orchestra, the choir and the audience are considered to be partaking in a private gathering. It did not matter that there could be hundreds of people present at happenings such as concerts and weddings. In recent years, however, I have seen several women onstage wearing the *buibui* in both small and larger gatherings, most recently during the Zanzibari festival *Sauti za Busara* in February 2009. Some of the women who were performing are employed by the music academy and thus normally wear the *buibui* at work.

⁷⁸ Racy, 2003; M. Ilyas, personal communication, January 20, 2008.

Matona's has a practical focus when he says "you have to come to the problem of why" there are next to none female instrumentalists in Stone Town. This focus is slightly atypical for male musicians in Stone Town. A vast majority of the other male members of the teaching staff are less inclined to explore why several of the young women who commence their musical education seem to quit after a while. There are a few young women who have stayed put at the academy, but most of them have left. Matona and Mariam suggest that one explanation may be that several parents have grave misgivings about leaving their daughters alone with male teachers and thereby spending much time with an unknown man. In a Muslim society it is uncustomary for an unmarried girl or woman to spend much time alone with a man to whom she is not related, a man who is 'un-kin' (Abu-Lughod, 1986; 1993). In addition to this code of behaviour, Mariam blames the parents' reluctance on what she calls a "Zanzibari mentality", arguing that men are taught to think that beautiful women are theirs "for the taking". Matona wholeheartedly agrees to Mariam's view on this. To clarify, Matona and Mariam refer to stories of young women who have been taken advantage of during classes, which unfortunately contributes to giving the respectable teachers an undeservedly bad reputation. When it comes to gossip and rumours, Stone Town is a small town, seething with talk. Even though such episodes have occurred, it is important to bear in mind that rumours are easily started and even more easily kept alive in the centre of Stone Town. Gossiping is often part of the conversational style among the city's inhabitants. It is, however, a fact that few Zanzibari women perform instrument on a high level. Zainab claims that the reasons lie as much with the common idea that women should be at home and take care of the children and not out alone at night working. She points out that several of her girlfriends always would feel that they ought to be taking care of their family if they were practising taarab and technical skills, let alone if they spent nights away from home performing for audiences.

It seems as if the difficulties in acquiring musical knowledge for young men and women, knowledge that render music as a profession possible, are two-folded. Firstly, there is the challenge of getting the initial access to musical training, and secondly, the challenge of maintaining the knowledge and managing to balance the musical profession with external factors. The second problem will be elaborated on in 6.1.3 below. As concerns the first aspect, all four informants agree that access to musical training is hard to get, even with an organized academy offering classes and tutoring. There is a lack of instruments and the situation in DCMA is quite different from Western schools, where

young musicians generally have an instrument at their disposal all the time. Most of the students in Stone Town borrow the academy's instruments and leave them there at the end of each day. An exception to this is a small group of privileged students, mostly older students on scholarship programs, who own their private taarab instruments. As an example, I would like to mention that the academy owns two double basses, one of which is nearly unplayable, in addition to one cello. Although there are more instruments in Stone Town, these are owned by the taarab orchestra and are at the disposal of no one but the orchestra members.

Still, the situation seems to be even more difficult for young women. To female aspiring musicians, there is also the problem of “getting into the schooling, to trust”, as Matona puts it. The “Zanzibari mind” is, according to Mariam, too embedded in Stone Town's society for women to be accomplished musicians. Few parents would like to risk putting their children alone with a stranger and, in their eyes, untrustworthy teacher. Besides, as there is a view that music is meant for leisurely activities only, most parents view the acquisition of musical knowledge as a distraction from more fitting career paths such as economy and medicine.⁷⁹ Bilal points out that it is hard for women to free themselves from the traditional codes of behaviour (cf. Cook, 2000). He encourages female musicians, as he anticipates that the feminine contribution might add something to the music timbre and expression. It may of course be debated whether the women really want this change. For many Zanzibari women, the notion of standing in front of a gender mixed crowd playing or singing is unappealing, with or without the *buibui*. They have no outspoken wish to perform. Actually, sometimes it is quite the contrary, just as I came across while partaking in a recording session in a private house in the centre of Stone Town.⁸⁰ Apart from the men in the orchestra, there was also a choir present to sing the choruses. The women all wore their *buibui* and did not show that they considered the taarab occasion anything but a public one. One of the women in the choir was a relative of the orchestra members and worked as a chef in Northern Zanzibar. It quickly became evident that her voice was much better than the rest of the choir and that she easily could have been a lead singer. She fervently denied any wish to be so, however, and it turned out that she was present at the recording only by special request from one of the key musicians. When I rejoined the same orchestra a year later for the CD-release concert, the chef had refused to perform, as that would mean singing onstage in front of an

⁷⁹ S. Said, personal communication, January 21, 2008.

⁸⁰ Mkunazini, January 30, 2008.

audience. She stated that she was anything but shy, but that she did not like people looking at her while singing.

This story is not uncommon, be it for potential instrumentalists or singers. It seems that several women have misgivings about performing taarab and views it as a solely male activity. Their place is in the audience or at home, they claim. However, for the few women who outspokenly have a wish to partake in taarab music, it is evident that there are challenges. In the article *Give sex or be blacklisted*, Adam (2008) interviews several young female musicians within different genres. These women have been hindered from performing because of their gender. He quotes several women who have been troubled by unwanted sexual advances and threatened with a blacklisting of their songs on air if they refused the advances. To give up musical careers as soon as marriage takes place is also unfortunately also rather common. Adam quotes a music producer stating that several talents get lost “on the pretext that it was customarily considered an abomination for a ‘decent’ man’s wife to be seen on stages just like other ‘hooligans’” (Ibid.). By “hooligans” the producer is referring to the opponents’ naming of *zenji flavour*, the Zanzibari style of hip-hop. Taarab contexts are considered to be slightly more “civilized”, as the musical style has been around for a long time, and originally it was the music of the middle class. Mariam contradicts this and is quoted in the article in the following way:

(...) even in the traditional *taarab* music style, female participants are not free to do what they please. She said, “They do not play or operate instruments. These are normally exclusively for the males who consider themselves superior. (...) “And taarab is not an exception,” she said. She revealed that quite a good number of taarab group leaders who are predominantly males are corrupt: “They hinder advancement of talented female musicians in many ways. In the first place they demand sexual favours so as they promote them in return,” Maryam[sic.] Hamdan said, adding that in such light many parents and husbands become reluctant to allow their daughters and wives respectively to engage with music in any way.

Zainab does not wish to elaborate on stories such as these. She is still a member of a taarab orchestra and is fighting to keep her place in the club. Being the only female instrumentalist is not easy, as she comes from mainland Tanzania and normally does not wear Muslim garments. She has had to fight to get access to both training and performing opportunities.

Romore (2005) has done a study of Muslim professional women in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, where she concludes that discrimination is taking place on the professional scene only on the basis of the *hijab*, or *buibui*. She argues that women who wear the traditional Muslim headscarf can be “active and engaged, well educated and professional” as well as “capable of being trained in different fields of profession”

(Ibid.:26). However, it also proved difficult for several of her informants to get employment, as their scarf made too clear a religious and political statement to their potential employers and “set the women aside” (Loc.cit). The situation in Stone Town is slightly different, as the vast majority of the women there are Muslims and working women who normally use the *buibui*. Nevertheless, the article is interesting as it points out the *buibui* as a political and religious symbol. Middle class women in Zanzibar wear it in public almost without exception, and it is employed as a sign of respectability and social standing on the woman’s part. Seemingly traditional respectability therefore goes hand in hand with a sense of religious respectability and belonging – and, with the religious codex, cultural belonging.

Zanzibari authorities attribute the lack of female instrumentalists more to the reaction of the community than to governmental censorship. However, according to the executive secretary of the Arts Council of Zanzibar (BASAZA), as quoted in Adam’s article (2008):

(...) the current unreceptive atmosphere for girls in music has its roots in political will of the first President Abeid Amani Karume who banned female Taarab groups following the Revolution of January 12 in 1964. (...) According to the executive secretary, those female music groups came to a stop following a ban from the government top officials who were of the opinion that those groups were dividing people in groups of fans. The government therefore ruled out that all the female taarab groups of Zanzibar should be dissolved into the ruling party, Afro Shiraz Party (ASP). He said that from then on, females became inactive, as any attempt to reorganise was being rebuked.

The secretary of the council, Ali Omar Baramia, placed under the Ministry of Information, Culture and Sports, thus claims that president Karume’s ban on women’s groups is indirectly responsible for the resistance towards female musicians in contemporary Stone Town. As the women tried to reform their groups and were being censored time and again, they finally stopped trying, Baramia claims. This behavioural pattern fits Zanzibar’s long history, seeing as its inhabitants have been taught to be apprehensive of the police. There have been several violent demonstrations in the wake of political elections, and the political peace is endangered during every election. There are major disagreements as to whether the archipelago of Zanzibar should be part of the union with the former Tanganyika or not. As there is little memory of taarab between the 1964 revolution and well into the 1970s, this might be the case (Askew, 2002). However, Mariam claims that the women’s groups were dissolved more due to their changing of repertoire than to a change in the political climate. There is no doubt that taarab came to be used by politicians to disseminate the political messages as described by Topp Fargion (2000). Mariam remembers the time where there was strong censorship on the songs being broadcast on all radio stations leading up to and following the revolution in 1964.

It seems like the censure of women's taarab groups played a role in weaning the population off the idea of female taarab. Before the revolution, the groups were numerous and the competition was fierce and public. The taarab orchestra were male only. The politically forced opening of the taarab orchestra to women did not have an immediate effect, and the orchestra continued as they did prior to the revolution. The fact that they were diminishing in power and size as taarab came under suspicion of being a "middle class activity", might have contributed to this. Interestingly, at no point did women play the instruments. They would sing, dance, play drums and play shakes, but they never played the melody instruments.⁸¹ If the women's groups were still functioning, it seems likely that they would have evolved with the rest of the Zanzibari society. Drawing strength from within the group, individuals may have been more easily accepted onto the contemporary public taarab scene.

Bilal is concerned that women will have to break out of the frozen gender roles of today, and claim their own right to play a musical instrument if they are to have a chance. Like Zainab, he stresses that women need role models to identify with. The latter has been one of my own concerns as well. When I first arrived in Stone Town, I was informed that no one knew how to play the cello properly and that my task was to give lessons so that the level could be raised. On my second trip I brought a cello from Agder University to DCMA, and there were then two cellos in Stone Town. Since then, the number of cello players in the city has increased and cello is once again a part of the orchestra. However, the demand for cello lessons is low compared to the demand for learning to play the guitar, the oud and the piano. In my opinion, this could be due to the fact that there are no dedicated players in Stone Town who prefer the cello above other instruments, and thereby no one will spread the enthusiasm. The importance of role models on each individual instrument is easily underestimated (Cheal, 2003). This is also the case with the importance of women serving as an example for other women who want to play an instrument.

Presently, it seems that Stone Town needs several more female instrumentalists in order to encourage young girls and their parents to acquire musical skills. When several women are established within the contemporary taarab scene as more or less professional performers, it will be interesting to see whether the lack of female instrumentalists is due to the restrictions of the society or a result of the women's personal wish. Mariam is

⁸¹ Racy, 2003; I. Farhan, personal communication, February 10, 2009.

already an able qanun player and is determined to act as an example to young women.⁸² Her brother's friend discouraged her from trying the accordion when she was young for no other reason than her gender, and Mariam has always been convinced that she would have been a professional musician if had she grown up in "a different country".

6.1.2 Learning by doing

If you are educated; you have your good job – you can sing, you can play; nobody will dare do anything to you. (Mariam)

Geertz (2000:167) writes that ethnography is "craft of place: [it works] by the light of local knowledge". He continues to say that what ethnography has in common with the law – aside "vagrant erudition and a fantastical air" – is that it absorbed with the "artisan task of seeing broad principles in parochial facts". All informants have grown up at the mercy of their surroundings' knowledge and their families' plans for their future. Their individual chances of performing music have varied accordingly. They developed an interest for music more or less independent from their surroundings. Although all of them were surrounded by music, only Bilal was encouraged to pursue the musical career path. They learnt by listening and watching. Zainab was the only one who started her musical training directly with lessons, while the others taught themselves the basics of music. However, although Bilal, Matona and Mariam started out as self-taught, they sooner or later received some sort of education. At the age of 16, Bilal moved to Jerusalem and was accepted to the Hebrew University where he completed his education in oud. Matona was sent to school by his parents and attended a very good school in Morogoro, as well as several others. The young Matona seems to have had some disagreements with his head teachers but managed to make important connections with some of Zanzibar's most skilful musicians before he went to school. His time as a musician in one of Stone Town's taarab orchestra prior to his leaving for school was also educational.

In fact, many taarab musicians assert that "playing in nightclubs" (i.e. participating in the orchestra in any concert situation), is the best place to learn the trade (Racy 2003:33). Mariam's musical education is of a more informal kind. Her husband, Mohamed Ilyas, is a well-known composer of taarab songs, and shortly after their wedding he started helping her with her compositions. According to Mariam herself, the songs improved a great deal after her husband started giving her advice and editing the

⁸² R. Armstrong, personal communication January 14, 2009.

⁸⁷ R. Armstrong, personal communication, January 14, 2009.

songs. While describing her improvements following his tutoring, Mariam points out that her husband relies on her as well. From her work in radio and television, she has gained a broad repertoire of songs from across the globe, enabling her to advise him when he has written something that sounds too much like, for example, an already composed English song.

For centuries, the most common way of acquiring necessary musical skills, knowledge and values to perform taarab has been through *apprenticeship* (Nielsen & Kvale, 1999). This is also the case in Zanzibar. The idea is that a young musician participates in the musical context through playing with the already educated musicians. The apprentice has a peripheral role at first, and as his or her competence grows, larger responsibilities are given. Through this process, technique and phrasing is acquired, and with continuous evaluation and criticism a musical identity is gradually constructed. Through participation in taarab orchestra and groups, musicians have gradually built a professional identity learning the musical skills by participating and receiving continuous evaluation throughout the process.

DCMA is nevertheless an institution with close ties to Western teaching institutions and has been so since the opening in 2002. The academy has a collaboration project with the University of Agder in Norway, Al Urmawi in Palestine and the University of Dar es Salaam in Tanzania. The cooperation includes an exchange program between the different institutions, which has led to formalization of the respective curricula towards European models. DCMA in particular has adapted the educational plans so as to correlate to Western teaching methods. Madsen (2007) points out that a natural conclusion would be that this redesign was due to Norwegian requirements, as students from Norwegian were meant to have the opportunity of spending a semester in Stone Town. According to the former leader of the project, however, the turn towards Western educational practices are due to wishes from DCMA's management rather than Norwegian persuasion.

Still, the curriculum-related instruction in DCMA happens primarily through classes and lessons. Although the subjects that are taught are Zanzibari, several have the form of European tutoring (Ibid.). This is opposed to the traditional method of knowledge transmission in Stone Town. In taarab, participation learning and observation has been the backbone of musical education (Racy, 2003). This is reflected in the informants' remarks, where they describe how they have watched and learned the craft of taarab. Matona would gradually practice different instruments in secret until one day he

could surprise the leader of his orchestra by playing an instrument and by that be accepted into the orchestra. Such behaviour is not common, as he shows both a disobedience to rules and great musicality by sneaking off to teach himself to play.

The importance of encountering role models, as mentioned earlier, is clearly present in the informants' stories. They knew people they could admire, people who played their instrument and possessed musical knowledge and experience. It is vital for the existence of ideal taarab in one form or another that young people who want to learn music meet skilled musicians on several instruments, including the rarer of the traditional instruments. If children only see the older musicians playing Western instruments like guitars and the piano, they will naturally move towards those instruments themselves (Cheal, 2003). Not the least because of the already heavy influence from Western TV shows. Whether ideal taarab should remain the same, is another discussion.

Like knowledge transmission can happen in several ways, there are different ways of maintaining the knowledge by practice. Whether a person is used to practise alone or in a group varies from culture to culture. Taarab has traditionally been an equally social and musical activity (Topp, 1992; Racy, 2003; Khamis 2002; 2005). A musician who is going to perform with an orchestra or a group does not spend much time rehearsing the tunes alone, as compared to the hours spent playing together with the orchestra. Except for Bilal, the informants count the rehearsal time with the orchestra as the most genuine taarab practice. Mariam is especially clear that a taarab musician is unable to play with the orchestra if he or she does not spend several nights a week with it. The technical aspects of playing, like exercises and scales, are nevertheless rehearsed alone. This view has not changed much, despite the changing times on the taarab scene and the altering job market. Taarab is still, in many ways, a social activity in that it involves several musicians. A solo performance is not taarab, regardless of the shift towards smaller ensembles on the contemporary musical scene.

The informants, especially Matona and Zainab, are frustrated over the lack of stamina displayed by many beginners, or rather, their parents. Several parents return after as little as a month to complain about their child's poor skills on an instrument. They complain that it is too difficult and too expensive to play and Zainab states that both the musicians and their parents are unfamiliar with the amount of practice needed. Formerly, musical knowledge was acquired over a long period of time, even years. The same knowledge is now being passed on through lessons. At DCMA the parents are paying for their children's tutoring, contrasting with the taarab orchestra where tutoring is time

consuming and not costly. The Zanzibaris are unaccustomed to paying for musical training and there is a deep-rooted mentality that it should not be necessary to pay for something earlier generations received at no cost as apprentices in the orchestra. Due to this mentality, the parents expect quicker results of the music academy to which they have paid a fee, than towards the traditional apprenticeship in the taarab orchestra. Bilal maintains that the level of performance is low but that several musicians have “a lot of feeling”. This opinion may be caused by the fact that Zanzibari taarab resembles Arabic taarab and Arabic music in general but has different ideals as concerns timbre. However, some musicians in Stone Town have what a European classically trained string player would call poor technique, such as a lack of flexibility in the wrists, rigid hands and, according to Western traditions, slumped postures. Several violin players hold their instrument lower than European musicians, the positioning resembling that of a folk musician. They are often remarkably versatile in their playing. Whether the performance is bad or relying on different ideals can thus be debated. That the pitch is sometimes out of tune, both to Arabic and European ears, is certain nevertheless.

As a result of the entire orchestra having to wait for one musician to correct a mistake or learn a line, the average taarab musician is quite patient during taarab rehearsals. Additionally, the pedagogy of learning traditionally involves a generous use of the word *tena*, which means ‘again’. Rather than stopping the musicians and pointing to each one to say what the mistake was, the leader simply requests that the orchestra play the song again. Western musicians and producers coming to work with the Stone Town orchestra have been impressed with this form of discipline through the years, as far back as in the 1980s.⁸⁷

6.1.3 Staying in the game

Some men, really, when [a woman] marries *mwanaume* [a man], he says that ‘no, I don’t want you to go play no more’. First time, he says that it’s ok. (...) after married, [whistles] *hakuna* [nothing]. They don’t it want anymore. (Zainab)

(...) you can sometimes spend time away from home. But [in] a little bit they will fight to get you back. (Matona)

For some people, the challenges in getting access to proper musical training and education represent the lesser of two deterrents. Sometimes the mere aspect of getting through every day as a performing musician in Zanzibari society seem even more challenging to a potential professional. Music has traditionally been seen as an accepted pursuit on an amateur level only, and several orchestra musicians still count their daytime

occupation as their “real job”. Compared to jobs in Zanzibar’s fastest growing industry, tourism, the pay is fairly low (Madsen, D., 2007). For those who have chosen to perform taarab music full time, it is a tough business.

There is much travelling involved in the musical profession. This is particularly true in Zanzibar, as only a few of the available jobs are located inside Stone Town. Previously, most big taarab concerts would take place in Stone Town and the musicians did not have to spend much time on transportation (Fair, 2001). Nowadays, hotel owners hire small groups of musicians to perform at their hotels. Playing in the numerous hotels on the island makes up an increasing number of the paid jobs for musicians (Madsen, D., 2007:46). More and more hotels are located on the northern and eastern side of the island near most of Zanzibar’s famous vast, sandy beaches. Since the pay for musicians is far from lucrative, the players cannot normally afford to hire a taxi to take them home at night. Many musicians do not have a car and they are therefore left with the local means of transportation, the *dala-dalas*. This transportation is either an open-sided truck or a minibus, but both means of transportation are normally packed with passengers and the roads are bumpy (McIntyre & McIntyre, 2009). Therefore, the musicians have to spend many late nights on public transportation to and fro their destination of their work, sometimes they must travel alone if they live in another direction than the rest of the performing group.

Both the time spent away from home and the solitary travelling complicates the everyday experiences for the musicians. Bilal and Mariam rarely travels on night time performances and if they do, they take a taxi or their own car. The travelling is difficult for women, as it is not normal for women to journey alone after dark. Matona is especially concerned with female musicians travelling alone, as they would be vulnerable to degrading behaviour from fellow male passengers. Moreover, it is generally not seen as respectable. Although I make use of the *dala-dalas* when I am in Zanzibar, it would be an unnecessary risk to travel alone with it late at night seeing as I am a woman. During my stays, I have heard several of the male musicians complain about the extended travelling that leaves them constantly tired. On occasions, the male performers have opinionated that women never could live the life they lead, with all the late nights, travelling and irregularity.

In contemporary Stone Town it is certainly a challenge for women to sustain a musician’s lifestyle. Matona have eight children and two wives to support, a not uncommon situation among the Zanzibari men. He finds it strenuous to stay away from

home every night, a sentiment his Dutch wife coincide with. The informants doubt whether a woman would be able to be absent from her children and husband every night. Zainab claims that it would be no problem as long as she was able to make money to support her family. However, it is doubtful whether she would be able to find a husband who would agree to be supported in such a fashion, as well as remaining with the children when a babysitter was unavailable, at least in the contemporary society. It would certainly be a highly unconventional division of labour. Nevertheless, Zainab maintains that times are changing and that she will be able to marry a man who would be willing to such a job-sharing. She is more concerned about finding such a man than worrying about the practicalities of everyday life. For other women, however, she is less optimistic. Few women would be willing to sacrifice what it takes to have music as a profession since they would prefer “to build a life with a man”, she states.

Matona is also worried about the turn of the economical situation. He realizes that the average Zanzibari benefits very little from the growing tourism on the islands. Although the living costs have increased, payments have not, except within the tourism industry (Madsen, B., 2003). The inhabitants of Stone Town want “European ways” with nicer cars, bigger houses and different clothes. Meanwhile, the payment for performing musicians is very low, especially in the hotels (Madsen, D., 2007). Here the musicians play for a few thousand shillings a night, which equals one cocktail on the hotel’s bar menu. Although both authorities and institutions have acted to raise the musicians’ pay, they continue to accept all job offers they get, in order to make as much money as possible.

The taarab orchestra traditionally seems to have provided its members with a social network and a sense of belonging, as well as a musical community. Crozier (1997:71) distinguishes between a personal identity and a social identity. Personal identity is defined as “an individual’s unique qualities, values and attributes” and reflects “his or her personal history”. A social identity, however, refers to “the social categories to which people belong, aspire to belong, or share important values with”. The musical and social context, with its fellow musicians and their values and ethical principles, is of importance to the participants in taarab music and their sense of selfhood. Through participation in a taarab context, the Zanzibari musicians experience the interaction between the dimensions of social and personal identity. Through this interaction the socialisation takes place and the musician’s identity may develop. In addition to the orchestra’ obvious musical intent, the social aspect of taarab has always been very

important. The notion of a socially fit musician is historically rooted. Racy (2003:33) writes:

In the taarab culture, artistry must be refined through proper socialization. Ideally speaking, performers and listeners are expected to observe what is generally known as *ādāb* (singular, *adab*), translated roughly as ‘manners’ or ‘codes of behavior’.

It has been argued that listening to and performing music is a social process guided by a set of interpretive motives, such as setting it in a cultural context while relating it with personal and social motives (Feld, 1984; Ruud, 1997). The original aims of the taarab orchestra Nadi Ikhwani Safaa hang written and framed on the wall where the orchestra rehearses and the members look at it every time they practice. The aims state that two of the purposes of the orchestra are ‘to arrange a place for members to meet for the purpose of relaxation and mutual understanding’ (rule 1a) and ‘to promote common desires between them so that they should be friends with a good disposition’ (rule 1b) (Topp, 1992:119). Although not always in the form of the women’s groups’ aid and assistance, the big taarab orchestra in contemporary Stone Town works from a similar model of looking after one another. If a member of the orchestra has difficulties, the code of behaviour does not allow the other members to stand idly by.

The contemporary market has made a turn from employing the large traditional orchestra towards what Madsen (2007:52) pertinently names ‘chamber taarab’. The term describes smaller groups of musicians as opposed to entire orchestra, and such groups are widely employed in the hotels throughout the main island. With this development follows a more commercialized focus, as the musicians are performing primarily for tourists in order to make money. The song lyrics of the taarab have always been important, but now the average hotel audience can no longer understand the texts (Khamis 2004a; 2004b). The traditional pieces are rearranged for smaller crews, while new pieces often are written directly for small groups. The circumstances of performing taarab in such surroundings have therefore changed considerably from the traditional taarab concerts where the orchestra and choir easily could comprise of thirty musicians and singers. It will be interesting to see what impact this development will have on the sense of belonging and identity that have distinguished the taarab orchestra for so long. When the taarab groups no longer consist of as many musicians as earlier, the security net provided by the group and strengthened by its numbers will consequently diminish. One of the reasons why Mariam wishes for women to reform the large women’s groups is just this social network the old groups provided. The women in the groups would help

each other not only with music, but also with the organisation of special occasions such as weddings or funerals.

There seems to be several elements that motivate the informants to continue their work and efforts on the contemporary taarab scene. Zainab states her reasons most clearly: She wants to be an example to young women, both as a musician and in the way she leads her life. Although she respects that not all women have a desire to be onstage performing taarab, she is determined to do what she can to pave the way for the next generation of women who want to study and perform music. Although she does not mention it herself, she has encountered numerous obstacles from the community in general because of her wish to perform. As she is from mainland Tanzania and seldom wears the *buibui*, she is accustomed to being viewed as progressive in many ways. Romore (2005) discusses the role of the *hijab* in Tanzanian mainland.⁸⁸ The use of the *hijab* with its *buibui* headscarf was officially adopted in Tanzania through parliamentary approval in November 1995. Romore (Ibid.:19) argues that the decision to formalize its use first of all stemmed from the fact that the president that time, Alhaj Hassan Mwinyi, was Zanzibari, and secondly since “Muslim educated students” demanded the right to wear *hijab* in school.

Zainab’s desire to be an example to other women, merged with her love of music, is what keeps her going. The affection for taarab is a shared trait for all four informants. They continue to involve themselves in the musical scene despite their individual concerns which include Bilal’s distrust of Stone Town’s moral codes and certain fellow musicians, Matona’s trials to combine family and career, Zainab’s worries about recognition within the musical society and future family, and finally Mariam’s concern for other female actor on the taarab scene. The four of them have a commitment to the concept of taarab (Racy, 2003) and the instruments and customs involved. Choosing music as a fulltime profession stands against established beliefs of what constitutes a “good” job. Bilal sums up the performers’ choice as a brave step in life, one he is impressed with.

6.2 Contemporary challenges

The Stone Town society is changing. In two decades, the number of international arrivals has increased by 70% (Madsen, D., 2007) and the city is wide open to tourists. A

⁸⁸ Cf. 6.1.1 *Getting access* on gender.

⁹⁰ Anonymous (cf. 4.6.2).

growing number of the Zanzibaris are employed by the tourism industry, be it in booking offices, in hotels or as suppliers of local goods. The development influences the performing musicians in Stone Town in several ways. As the cultural scene is changing, the musical scene changes with it. Since the 1964 revolution and the merging with the former Tanganyika to form the United Republic of Tanzania, the day-to-day experiences have been affected on innumerable levels for the Zanzibaris. Like all changes and processes, this has brought with it challenges and in some cases conflicts. The Zanzibari society is a Muslim society. As Western ways gain more and more influence in Stone Town through television and tourists, young men and women challenge once self-evident truths in the traditional society. The taarab orchestra face change and competition from DCMA in the changing market, educating female performers and at times leaving individuals on a collision course with established institutions. I discuss contemporary challenges in Stone Town broken down into the following sub-headings: *Underlying differences* and *Ongoing processes in society*.

6.2.1 Underlying differences

In this day, music was not a question of money, only a few shilling. So if you don't have a good education, as a woman and you enter music, it means you want men to sleep with you. (Mariam)

The history of Stone Town has been influenced by various nationalities throughout the years. Visitors have either insisted on, or been allowed to, leave an imprint on the city; one of the most marked traits of the population today is its diversity in both customs and heritage (McIntyre & McIntyre, 2009). Nevertheless, most inhabitants have a strong identity as being 'Zanzibari', and they are quick to point out customs and traditions that signify their way of life with perceptible pride.

However, Stone Town society is not difficulties, although the government is papering over the cracks in the face of the growing tourism. The history of the archipelago is marked by the fact that it has seen governments far apart in ideologies and methods as well as nationality and religion. At all times, parts of the population have been adversary to contemporary authorities, and torture has been employed in the prisons. There have been times of acute unrest and violent demonstrations in Stone Town (Hirschler, 2004). Following each governmental election, the political climate heats up, and the peace of everyday life is endangered.

Although several Zanzibaris complain that life conditions have worsened and the economical gap between themselves and the governmental officials and non-Zanzibari residents have increased, the political unrest is now less publicly pronounced than e.g.

following the revolutions in 1964 and 1976. An idyllic face is put on Zanzibar for the benefit of the growing number of tourists. This is due to the fact that tourism is of great importance to Zanzibar's economy and currently supplies a great number of Zanzibaris with work (Hirschler, 2004; Madsen, B., 2003). While any unrest is tentatively kept at bay by governmental forces, most Zanzibaris have a fundamental mistrust of the authorities and go to great lengths not to involve e.g. the police. As a Zanzibari friend⁹⁰ put it: "The best way to see if a person is a MP (Member of Parliament) is to look at the car. Is it a large, clean and oversized SUV? Then it's governmental. Does it drive like it does not matter if it hits someone? Then it's governmental."

There is a proliferation of tourism on all parts of Unguja, and several Zanzibaris are now voicing concern and anger over certain hotel moguls' business methods (Dickinson, 2004).⁹¹ One example is the situation with the Italian tourism to Zanzibar.⁹² The Zanzibari inhabitants benefit very little from the growing tourism in their neighbourhoods. In some places, the tourism has affected the Zanzibaris who are not involved with it for the worse. Several airbuses arrive from Italian destinations every week to transport tourists directly from the airport on the west coast over to the east coast. The tourists are accommodated in large hotel villages, segregated from the "local" community, off limits to the Zanzibaris living near by. Classical Italian food is imported from Europe and served by a staff hired primarily from mainland Tanzania. Several restaurants only serve Italian costumers; I have had the experience of being sent away from a restaurant in the north by a Tanzanian waiter with the words "Not Italian? I'm very sorry: Only Italians allowed for the next five years". It is rumoured that several enterprises change the owner's name on the legal documents every six months so as to benefit from the six months' tax-exempt for newly started businesses by Zanzibari law. Thus, the Zanzibari population see very little of the income generated by this tourism branch. So far, government officials have been positively inclined towards this industry, but there are indications that this is beginning to change. An increasing number of Zanzibaris are publicly voicing their distrust in the hotel moguls' methods and business ethics.

The hotels and restaurants in the archipelago represent the main venue for the previously mentioned 'chamber taarab' (see 6.1.3 above). Although the supply of jobs is ample, each individual job is comparatively low-paid and the musicians generally need to

⁹¹ Although the informants speak minimal on the matter and only one directly touch the subject, they indirectly speak of it, commenting e.g. on the growing market for 'chamber taarab' in the hotels. I therefore see the question as important.

⁹² Cf. e.g. www.zanzibar-holiday.com/getting_to_zanzibar.html.

accept as many jobs as are available in order to support a family. Returning to their homes the same night, often on the opposite side of the island, this night time travel is difficult to undertake for single female musicians. The circumstances put a strain on taarab performers in contemporary Stone Town.

Madsen (2007) discusses a generation gap as a newly arisen problem in taarab in Stone Town. He describes a situation where younger musicians strive towards a more European understanding of the term ‘professionalism’ with regards to pedagogy, payment and identity. A number of the elder musicians are of the opinion that taarab primarily is a non-profit social activity for the individual, a leisurely (yet important) activity to be enjoyed besides daytime work. The conflict between younger and older musicians is surfacing on a number of fields. The musicians especially view three areas of the performance of taarab differently; the notion of professionalism, economical ideals and diverging views on the appropriate pedagogical approach to learning. The three areas of dispute interweave tightly, as they are all closely connected to former and current codes of behaviour in Stone Town.

Zanzibari society traditionally value age as a token of respect and elder men and women are to be properly greeted and treated accordingly. This respect for elders emerge i.a. in the greeting phrase *shikamoo*, which translates roughly to ‘I sit at/hold your feet’, which is the greeting a young person uses to and older. The latter then answer *marahaba*, which means ‘I am delighted/It gives me great pleasure’.⁹³ However, as tourism is affecting the lives of more and more taarab musicians, the once indisputable internal ranking is passed over by younger musicians. As the sovereignty of age in musical circles is changing, the conflict is surfacing on several levels. Madsen describes how younger musicians choose to be absent from rehearsals in the taarab clubs in order to perform with smaller groups in the hotels throughout the island. He refers how elder members of the orchestra scorn this attitude as being “in it for the money” (Ibid.:82) and criticize the younger orchestra members. The younger musicians in their turn refer to the elders as only being there for the social activity and not for the musical performance. They complain how this affects the performance level and accuse the older musicians of being lazy and unwilling to respect the younger performers’ need to make money “like professionals”⁹⁴. The conflict is therefore an economical one as well as a problem of conflicting ideals.

⁹³ Translation: A. Said, personal communication, June 20, 2006. See also Madsen, D., 2007; Binns, 2006.

⁹⁴ Anonymous (cf. 4.6.2).

The notion ‘a respectable musician’ has changed somewhat during the last decades. Previously, it was neither common nor any status involved in presenting yourself as a full time taarab professional. The elder generation of musicians, who grew up with the taarab orchestra as the only arena of performance had other professions in addition to performing music. Even the late Seif Salim Saleh, a well-known and respected taarab composer, singer and violinist, had an income derived from another career than music. Mariam particularly appraises this way of pursuing music as commendable. However, she argues that the value of studying does not lie in choice of profession but that it is vital to study in order to get an education. Study music if you want to be a musician but study *something* anyway, she argues.

Prior to the proliferation of tourism in Stone Town and the opening of DCMA, music was an activity for the education of the mind and evolution of social skills, and not a means to make money. The term of professionalism is therefore central to this conflict. Where there earlier were very few musicians who did not have another profession besides performing music, the younger musicians now take pride in performing full time and in calling themselves professionals.⁹⁵ The word ‘professional’ is applied liberally by young musicians, as is the idea of professionalism. It is used in everyday speech to describe people who have skills in music and make money by playing. The informants employ the word to describe a person who is able to play an instrument on a high technical level. Whichever way the word is applied, consensus is that a professional has to make some amount of money from his or her performance. The aspect of music as an only career path is what sets most Zanzibaris against the idea of full time female instrumentalists.⁹⁶ The main counter-argument from several of the city’s critics is that a woman will be unable to take care of her family when she spends all her time on music. According to public opinion, a woman who fails at running a household and looking after her family is an irresponsible and unrespectable woman. The traditional idea is moreover that the man is the breadwinner in the family. Topp Fargion (1999) points out that as living costs have increased in the last years, several men have economical difficulties and are forced to postpone marriage until they can afford to support a wife. The notion of a woman as the sole breadwinner in a household is absurd to most Zanzibari men, according to the informants.

There are also conflicting thoughts on the ideological aspects on taarab. Music played for the sake of pleasure or entertainment has traditionally been seen in Islam as

⁹⁵ R. Suleiman, personal communication, February 13, 2009.

⁹⁶ S. Said, personal communication, January 21, 2008.

harám, forbidden, the exception being Qur’anic chant. The performance of music for entertainment has therefore only been recommended as a social activity and in small amounts, as too much music was thought to corrupt the human being away from God.⁹⁷ Taarab has therefore been kept at an amateur level and have had a conscious air of a social activity more than a musical one. This interpretation of Islam is disputed by several high officials in Stone Town, who claim that changes in political climates are more to blame for trends in Zanzibari history than Muslim laws of forbidden and allowed aspects of music (Adam, 2008). The way younger musicians have moved away from this view of musical performance in the last years towards more commercialistic practices of taarab is nevertheless upsetting to some of the most experienced musicians. To receive individual pay after concerts, to spend several hours practicing on a daily basis and to openly advertise your own skills and experience with taarab is still seen as corruptive practices by a few of the elders. However, some (young and old) claim that the critique offered by these musicians (and, in some cases, religious leaders) have as much to do with a resistance towards changing times as the idea of commercialism being contradictory to Islamic views. The latter view is supported by Adam’s article, in which prominent Zanzibaris were interviewed on the subject of women in contemporary taarab (Ibid.):

Many people have claimed that Islam, which is the religion of the majority in Zanzibar, has contributed to the undermining of female musicians to take part in music. Farrid Himid, a historian and publisher of a now censored cultural newspaper, *Fahari ya Zanzibar* (The Pride of Zanzibar), refutes this claim: ‘It is all about hypocrisy and selfishness, not about Islam,’ he told Freemuse, adding that Islam offers lots of opportunities for female artists to exercise their talents, but some influential people mystify the topic and deprive women to perform music because of personal interests and biases.

Adam quotes the historian and publisher Himid as saying that there are lots of opportunities for music in Islam and that “those who use this Holy religion of Allah to ban music are doing so mistakenly”. He argues that this thinking concurs with that of Shaykh Ibrahim Ramadan Al-Mardini, an Islamic scholar of the Beirut Studies and Documentation Centre. According to Adam, Al-Mardini “proves false the assertion that there should be a ban of music in the Holy Qur’an”(Loc.cit.).

There is also a pedagogical discussion taking place in contemporary Stone Town. The method of learning taarab has traditionally and almost without exception, been the method of apprenticeship (Nielsen & Kvale, 1999) as opposed to formalized teaching classes. This has changed with the opening of DCMA in 2002. Students at the music academy today are taught in classes as well as one-on-one instruction. Some subjects are

⁹⁷ Kirkegaard, 1996; Racy, 2003; Al Faruqi, 1985; Cook, 2000.

taught in the classical American and European classroom style with chalk, a blackboard and pen and paper. In these classes the students are expected to acquire theoretical knowledge, whereas the practical performance classes are more similar to the traditional apprenticeship tutoring.

While attending taarab classes, Madsen (2007:82) observed what he aptly named “*tena* pedagogy”. During a musical rehearsal, he observed that the Zanzibari teacher would comment very little on details and technical aspects of the performance. When the student orchestra had finished rehearsing a song, the teacher would, more often than not, simply say “*tena*” (meaning ‘again’) and the orchestra would replay the song. His observations concur with my experiences with taarab rehearsals. I find that this method has changed very little since the opening of DCMA, even though the Western influences have become more and more pronounced elsewhere in the academy. Many teachers have e.g. picked up the habit of counting in with the Americanized “one, two, three and four”, regardless of the time of the piece that is rehearsed. The *tena* teaching is perhaps due to long traditions of learning by doing, i.e. learning by participating. Formerly, in the big taarab orchestra, with several skilled and experienced musicians, the constant repetition would ultimately inform the new students of proper performing. Through listening and memorizing they would figure out how a song was correctly performed with regards to rhythm, phrasing and melody. The skilled musicians would thus rely less on a teacher’s teaching skills and more on the apprentice’s ability to grasp several concepts by listening without any individual tutoring. In a situation where the majority of the players are students, however, this pedagogical approach is easily somewhat confusing, as it becomes hard for the students to distinguish the teacher’s playing from the rest of the orchestra; a teacher often plays on a different instrument than the students he or she is teaching.

The role of DCMA on Stone Town’s musical scene is debated. The aims of the institution are much discussed and all the informants find flaws with the current situation.⁹⁸ However, they agree that the existence of the academy is a good thing, no matter the improvements they would like to see. The website of DCMA states that one of its aims is the promotion of “professional excellence among musicians through training, seminars, workshops, debates etc.” as well as “to give skills and resources to a group of

⁹⁸ Madsen, D., 2007; anonymous sources (cf. 4.6.2). Several musicians’ dependence on the DCMA to provide work lead to a wish for anonymity. Although the critic offered by the musicians connected with the academy is ample, it should be noted that certain individuals seem to have a general inclination to complain.

talented young people so that they can make a living from music”.⁹⁹ According to Matona, an unnecessary consequence of the focus on professionalism is that the board of the academy is trying to bite off more than they can chew. Matona criticizes the board for a too strong focus on Western learning techniques, and claims that too much is expected of scholarship students. The students are left with too little time to practise their technical skills, as they have to participate in too many other aspects of the teaching to earn their economical support. Too many rules make the students disinclined to initiative and loyalty towards the institution, he claims. A more effective way of managing DCMA would be to make the students “more like family”. By this, Matona suggests that the academy would benefit more from being run with a carrot than a stick as has been customary in the old taarab orchestra. Here the incentives to commitment, such as a social network and fellowship, were greater than the punishments feared by a lazy attitude or obstinate behaviour.

In the early years of DCMA, the school premises were packed with people practicing and rehearsing for internal as well as external concerts. The rehearsal rooms were nearly always occupied, and there were students and teachers lingering in the common areas. The atmosphere now is slightly changed and the rooms are oftentimes empty when they are not used for lessons and workshops. Although this change has come gradually since I visited in 2004, I particularly noticed it when I returned to Stone Town at the beginning of 2008. Walking around the premises, I started reflecting on the new silence and the lack of students strolling around. In my opinion, the academy now has more the air of a Western academy, where students and teachers generally show up for their lessons and teaching and leave afterwards to conduct their business elsewhere.¹⁰⁰ According to Matona and Bilal, the slight change is a sign of something more serious. They suggest that the students have too weak a sense of belonging to the academy’s community. Although this conclusion may seem too hastily drawn, it is important to bear in mind the general community in which DCMA finds itself. Much of the sociability and fellowship take place in the common areas of the city. The local market area in Darajani is more or less packed with people from sunrise to sunset and certain areas are informally reserved for certain kinds of people and businesses. If I e.g. wanted to get hold of the father of the Zanzibari family I belonged to and was told that he would be found in the centre of Stone Town, I would simply walk to a designated area near the mosques in Darajani to look for him. By walking around and looking for him I normally had better

⁹⁹ Retrieved July 2, 2007 from www.zanzibarmusic.org.

¹⁰⁰ Cf. Lehmann and Jørgensen, 1997.

chances of finding him than by calling his cell phone. In Stone Town, no people lingering is a greater sign of abandonment than in Western countries. Thus, I share both Matona and Bilal's concern that the music academy is absenting itself from the community.

Matona further worries that the academy is too little known among Zanzibaris in general. He claims that the majority of Stone Town's inhabitants have little, if any, awareness of the presence of the school. Several students are children of expatriates or guest workers, although the majority of the students are Zanzibari. Sources at DCMA are concerned that the academy's profile is more tourist friendly than it is appealing to Zanzibari families.¹⁰¹ They want to help the Zanzibaris "reclaim" the musical education and promote the academy and its objectives throughout the archipelago by calling for a local manager to lead projects in addition to using external resources hired by the board of the academy. Undoubtedly, the presence of a suitably educated Zanzibari man or woman could function well as a mediator and organizer between the students, teachers and the academy board. However, the competence contributed by non-Zanzibari resources is invaluable to both the initiation and running of DCMA. The academy was founded by non-Zanzibaris, and it relies on both musical and administrative skills provided by non-Zanzibaris.

One of Bilal's greatest concerns is the way Western money is coming into the cultural community in Stone Town. All of the three largest cultural establishments, namely the film festival ZIFF, the music festival Sauti za Busara, and DCMA, have access to Western economical resources to varying degrees. The rationale behind these three cultural institutions came from resident non-Zanzibaris, although they had close ties to and great knowledge of the archipelago. Bilal calls for a revaluation of the way the economical resources are spent in order to enhance cultural life in Stone Town. He has does not doubt that the intentions behind the contributions are good but sees misunderstandings happen between the managements and residing inhabitants. Stone Town is a small city as cultural life is concerned, and its main actors are widely involved. However, it is important to note that the three abovementioned cultural establishments are individual institutions with separate objectives and aims.¹⁰² It is inappropriate to apply the same yardstick to all cultural establishments with access to Western funding and resources. With regards to DCMA, Bilal criticizes those who come to Stone Town with solely academic ambitions trying to implement Western musical codes onto Stone

¹⁰¹ Anonymous (cf. 4.6.2).

¹⁰² www.busaramusic.org; www.ziff.or.tz; www.zanzibarmusic.org.

Town's musical heritage. Taarab music does not merely require intellectual efforts to be understood. It is much more in need of people who "can feel" the culture and "be close" to the musicians as well as genuinely enjoy the music.

The cultural framework of a Western scholar or performers who encounters taarab can easily lead to misunderstandings and unnecessary frustration in both parties. Generally, the task of teaching a musician of a different nationality his or her own music is a daunting experience. Moreover, it is oftentimes unnecessary. In my experience, a great amount of listening is required before it is possible to begin grasping the central themes of a musical style that is so closely connected to the Zanzibari identity as taarab is. After over six years of performing taarab with Zanzibari musicians, I am still amazed at the complexity that reveals itself in the long-established songs and their lyrics. As I grasp one layer of the music, the lyrics and the social intricacy involved, another emerges and leaves me with several new questions as to the why, when and how.

During a taarab lesson, it seems to me that the most appropriate approach from a Western musician is to listen to the best of one's ability to the cultural and musical skills of the student and introduce technical tools to enhance the cultural skills necessary. I have been reluctant to push Zanzibari cello beginners ahead with Western exercises and scales only. To me, a more expedient approach has been to teach the student the basics of correct technique such as placement of the hands, instrument and body, and then practice these skills with already known harmonics. On more than one occasion I have found that the timbre of the playing has changed dramatically to the better when a student has been allowed to play already known tunes or melodies instead of Western sonatas or scales. It is worth mentioning, however, that as the student progresses, the introduction to and rehearsing of musical theory is important to evolve as a musician. An increasing number of taarab songs are notated in major and minor rather than the Arabic *maqām*, as Topp noted as early as in 1992, and the young musicians need to familiarize themselves with this terminology. Nevertheless, no matter the notation, the general sentiment of most taarab melodies still remains closer to the Arabic cultural heritage. The students are educating themselves to perform on a musical scene where they need taarab competence rather than intimate knowledge of Bach and Vivaldi. As stated by the objectives of DCMA, the aim for music lessons is to equip young musicians so they can survive and evolve on the professional musical scene. In my opinion they benefit more from learning to play taarab directly, instead of getting Western classical schooling first and move on to taarab songs later.

The situation for female performers is, and has always been, subject to discussions among Stone Town's inhabitants (Fair, 2001). The initial process of and the introduction to the contemporary musical scene is complicated for most women, seeing as men dominate the taarab scene in Stone Town. With the emergence of Siti binti Saad as the most noted performer in Zanzibar in the 1930s, the situation was different (Fair, 2001). Topp Fargion (2000:4) writes that

Until the 1930s, then, taarab appears to have been exclusively a male activity. At least there is very little information pertaining to women's participation in taarab before this time. Women were involved in making music within their distinctive "women's culture", a culture dominated by involvement in voluntary associations including the performance of ngoma.

In the 1950s there were several women's taarab groups, the largest being Sahib al-Ari (meaning sisters or friends of a cooperative and determined spirit), Royal Air Force and Royal Navy (Topp, 1992; Kirkegaard, 1996). Some of these had the look and style of both orchestra and marching bands. There was lively competition between the groups and the women would aid other members of the group, whenever necessary. Mariam advocates the return of women's networks as they rendered the women strong and independent in a different manner than is possible today. Topp (1992) supports this assessment of the groups and argues in her dissertation that women are more than mere objects and consumers of taarab. They cannot be labelled merely as bystanders, she argues, since they are writers of lyrics and make up the main audience in concerts. In her article on the *mpasho* phenomenon, Topp Fargion (2000) writes about the involvement of women in taarab. They have had a central role in the performance situation for centuries. They would sing among themselves throughout the day during their domestic chores (Ibid.:3):

Many of [the women's] poems relate to activities attached to their roles in society. Members in women's associations sang among themselves while carrying out their various domestic chores. These lyrics are concerned with everyday life and the general social condition, in striking contrast to the aloofness desired of the poetry of orchestral taarab. The merging of these two types of lyrics not only marked the beginning of *kidumbak* and *taarab ya wanawake* but was also the start of the Swahili-isation or localisation of orchestral taarab.

Her argument does not include a presupposition of female performing instrumentalists as an aim for the style, however, she only focuses on the participation of women in general. The traditional roles of women in taarab has been that of audience, consumers, singers and, occasionally, lyric composers. Mariam is not only one of the few women taarab composers of her generation. She is one of the few who composes both melody and lyrics to her songs as well. Being a strong supporter of female instrumentalists, she is determined to be the first professional female qanun player. The fact that Zainab already is a member of the Culture Music Club seems to matter little to her and she maintains her

view that there are no “real” female instrumentalists in Stone Town. She is currently teaching herself the qanun with the help of a teacher in Cairo and has encountered innumerable obstacles in her process despite her high standing in Stone Town society. Initially, she borrowed a spare qanun from Nadi Ikhwani Safaa but the orchestra kept coming up with vicarious reasons to retrieve it. Eventually, she had to buy her own instrument.

Zainab is often left behind when the orchestra is touring, and she has had to fight hard to earn a place in the orchestra at all. The notion of female instrumental performers is a strange one for the older Zanzibari musicians. Before the 1964 revolution, taarab orchestra were male only, and it was only when taarab came to be used as a political means by the new government that the orchestra, on paper at least, became gender neutral.¹⁰³ However, the resistance to open up for women within taarab circles did not primarily derive from a belief that women were unsuited to play instruments or stay away from home. Topp (1992) refers to several male musicians who claim that the main reason for keeping the orchestra closed to women was a conviction that the male members would be too easily distracted to be able to concentrate fully on the music. The reason for the exclusion was therefore supposed to be the weakness on the men’s part, rather than unsuitability on the women’s part. Whatever the reason, the orchestra instruments remained virtually inaccessible to women. Mariam suggests there was a fear that women would become too independent if they were able to learn how to play musical instruments.

In the traditional women’s groups, the men would still be offered work as instrumentalists. If women had taught themselves how to play melodic instruments as well as drums and shakes, the women’s groups would have become completely autonomous. The result would be that men would be out of work, as the women would employ each other to perform instead of the men. Mariam is optimistic about the development at DCMA in this respect, as several women are currently studying melodic instruments at the academy. She is hoping increased instrumental knowledge among women will start up women’s groups once again. But Matona points out that several female students drop out of classes after a time, with only a few exceptions. The reasons for this are numerous. Many young women reach the age where they are expected to either get married or get themselves a “real” and more generally acknowledged education. When faced with the choice, many choose to leave music as a career path and

¹⁰³ Fair, 2001; Topp, 1992.

pursue more traditional lines of work. Working as secretaries, clerks, tourism agents and nurses are more commonly approved career choices.¹⁰⁴ Moreover, there are the occasional stories of male teachers exploiting young women, a situation which makes parents and their daughters less inclined to invest money in a musical education. Zainab further claims that many women are easily distracted by their boyfriends and lose parts of their own will and self control when they get a boyfriend. In a society that traditionally emphasizes the virtue of making advantageous marriages and economical security, this view is perhaps not an unreasonable one. Most women and men are brought up with the notion that the man is the head of the family and the breadwinner.

The fact that women traditionally have been brought up to expect support from their husband while taking care of the children, may help explain a concern both Matona and Mariam have. They state that several women who gain membership in the clubs and rise to solo singers turn out to be the girlfriends of the orchestra's leading members. Although it is a touchy subject, all members of the teaching staff at DCMA have seen examples of how women singers or instrumentalists join the clubs, ending up dating their bosses. This is not a purely Zanzibari phenomenon (Leonard, 2007) and the situation in Zanzibar can not follow a general conclusion about all women in taarab. However, it exemplifies the situation in Stone Town. There are several lead singers and choir singers in the orchestra and they are perfectly respectable in their behaviour. In fact, this is what worries Mariam the most: "We are losing good voices", she claims. In her years she has heard numerous stories of women who have been pushed out of groups after refusing the advances of male members. The other informants present similar accounts of situations where young women known to both them and me have started out as either a promising instrumentalist or a choir singer, only to be pushed from the instrument into the choir or out of the orchestra entirely. The stories make a basis for why all informants insist that women have to study before they enter any group. If a woman has higher education, no matter what kind, she is less susceptible to the effect of unwanted advances. When the rest of the orchestra is aware that she has work, or the possibility to work, already, they know that she is to be treated with respect.

As a result of her many experiences with Zanzibari men on the musical scene, Zainab has become even more set on being an example to other women. Together with Mariam she urges women to complete their studies, and not drop out when they marry or have children. Women are important to taarab, they claim. This view is supported by

¹⁰⁴ S. Said, personal communication, January 30, 2008.

Ntarangwi (2003), who claims that the taarab scene presents Muslim women with a unique opportunity to deconstruct commonly accepted assumptions of men's superiority. Abu-Lughod (1993; 1999) also supports musical contexts as an opportunity to voice female values and views. In Stone Town the decline in traditional taarab concerts paired with the increase in modern taarab gatherings of quite a different nature has left many women without an approved concert alternative on the contemporary public scene. Adam (2008) relates that female participation in music was especially high from 1902, when the first women's taarab group was formed, up until the 1964 revolution:

(...) in those times female musicians were very active and they gave life to the lives of the people in Zanzibar. According to the executive secretary, those female music groups came to a stop following a ban from the government top officials who were of the opinion that [women's taarab] groups were dividing people in groups of fans. The government therefore ruled out that all the female taarab groups of Zanzibar should be dissolved into the ruling party, Afro Shiraz Party (ASP). (...) females became inactive, as any attempt to reorganize was being rebuked.

An official of the Zanzibari Censorship Board, Suleiman M. Suleiman, says the Zanzibari government is not as opposed to the idea of more female musicians as local community is (Ibid.). He refers to the film about the kidumbak and taarab performer Bi Kidude, called *As Old As My Tongue*. It was the public opinion, and not the government officials, who wanted the film censored. The film describes Zanzibari rites of passage¹⁰⁵ such as *unyago*, a pre-wedding women only ritual to prepare young women for matrimony. What takes place during these rites of passage is considered secret knowledge among women, and the film was thus viewed as controversial.¹⁰⁶

The view on sexuality as a highly present, but nevertheless unspoken theme is interesting. When I was living with the Zanzibari family, the eldest daughter had just returned home from Mombassa. She had married an older man who had sent an emissary to their marriage ceremony, as he himself was ill at the time. As it turned out, she never met her husband before he died, and she was thus a widow in mourning at the age of 24. According to tradition, she had gone to her future mother-in-law prior to the wedding to undergo appropriate preparations before entering life as a married woman. The women from both families had joined her and completed her knowledge of how to take care of her husband and family. A part of the preparation was practising her dance for him on their wedding night. Although she would no longer need the dance, she spent many hours in the family's living room practising this form of belly dancing and teaching me the movements and gestures, all the while keeping a sharp eye out for any approaching males. The dance is designed to please the husband on the newlyweds' wedding night

¹⁰⁵ Cf. Ntarangwi, 2003; Topp, 1992; Fair 2001.

¹⁰⁶ Adam, 2007; R. Armstrong, personal communication, January 14, 2009.

and is both elegant and highly suggestive in its movements. Several women, especially Zanzibari Arabs, practise this dancing to perfection from they are young girls.¹⁰⁷ However, it is not considered appropriate behaviour among middle class women to touch the topic with males present, let alone dance in public. The same women who are able to move in very sensual ways in the privacy of their homes may publicly scorn another woman who displays her sexuality in an obvious way in public. Even at the old taarab concerts, which were once considered private events, the dancing would never be as sensual as most women are capable of. The views on dancing, sexuality and propriety are generally acknowledged. Nevertheless, there are women performing with kidumbak groups who have no problems with dancing in public.

This unwillingness to discuss and acknowledge the existence of female sexuality in public is perhaps a reason why certain parents have misgivings about their daughters' instrumental education. To play an instrument is a physical activity, which directs the attention toward the body of the performer. While giving classes at DCMA, I have been cautious to wear appropriate clothing and always ask for permission before touching the student to demonstrate a point. More than one female cello student has initially been unwilling to spread her legs wide enough to place the cello appropriately. Being the only (Western) female teacher giving lessons on a traditional taarab instrument and up until recent years, the only female instrumental teacher at all at the music academy has made me aware of the physical aspect of playing and teaching an instrument in a Muslim country. Zanzibari women who play the cello appropriately attired in long, black covers and a *buibui* have oftentimes expressed that they felt exposed in the posture with their skirts pulled slightly up so as to fit the cello. In order to avoid making male students too uncomfortable, the teacher's as well as the student's shoulders, legs and even hair was covered during the lessons. Whether this physical aspect of playing instruments is part of why many Zanzibari men have more or less logically founded misgivings about female instrumentalists, I cannot be sure. However, in a society with deeply founded unspoken rules of propriety with regards to attire as well as attitude and posture, I would not be surprised if the notions take a while to change. It is worth mentioning, however, that the degree of physicality varies with the instrument. Playing the cello requires large movements of the body, whereas the qanun does not.

The informants have several views on the significance their religion could play and have played in their acquisition of musical knowledge. Whether or not the Zanzibari

¹⁰⁷ A. Said, personal communication, July 18, 2005.

form of Islam is a challenge and a source of conflicts to the performance of taarab, they are reluctant to say. Their focus is more on the practical implications of religion and how these affect their own life. Bilal feels that he is unable to rely on many of the Zanzibaris, and hesitates to become close friends with them. According to him, trustworthiness and diligence are two of the central values in Islam, a statement supported by Cook (2000). Bilal says:

(...) the prophet Muhammad, one of the first things he said when he came with this new religion and he made this revolution in the East – it changed everything. He said: ‘You have to read and study, and you have to work hard’. This is one of the basic things that the religion is based on. Knowledge.....and establishing things. Making things, creating, working. Acting as a society, a community, helping each other. Equality. All these values.

The employment of metaphors to describe love, passion and lust in taarab poetry has long usage (Khamis, 2004a; Racy, 2003). Mariam exploited this fact when she was unable to play taarab songs that talked about love in a direct manner in the 1960s and 1970s due to Karume’s new political system. During these years there was a serious attempt to change taarab permanently into a political tool, an attempt that dried out the musical scene for a while as several key musicians and lyricists stopped composing.

However, the belief in religious restrictions and the power of disrespect and jealousy over those who defied the restrictions also made parents unwilling to let their children perform music. Even before the period of prohibition, Mariam remembers that her ten years old sister was asked to perform with a group. Her mother refused, as she was afraid that her daughter’s exposal might cause envy with fellow Zanzibaris, and by that set “the evil eye” on the family:

My mother said ‘no, I don’t want my child to go there and people will see her singing like that’. Because we had this feeling that there would be envious [people], and that someone would give them the evil eye.

It is evident, however, that the religious restrictions are looser than before. Mariam and her sisters would no longer have had to cover their faces to attend taarab concerts and today most musicians pay little attention to prayer times if they interfere with a rehearsal or performance. Matona and Bilal are both convinced that the challenges for female performers in contemporary Stone Town are not religiously founded but rather the community’s misunderstandings of music and musical performances. It seems likely that several of the views on accepted behaviour that does and does not limit the women’s freedom of movement are reminiscences of earlier times more than current restrictions based on Islamic views. Still, within the Stone Town community there is a widening gap between those who favour a commercialised progress towards American and European market forces and values, and the relatively new segment of the population who turn

towards more fundamentalist Islamic thinking (cf. Mentan, 2004). In the local market the differences shows in the different women's attire: There are both bare headed women walking around as well as entirely covered women silhouettes in black fabrics.

6.2.2 Ongoing processes in society

You can't come to this place with academic perspectives. And make like academic and Western structures. And put it here and frame the people – put the people in a frame. And tell them: 'This is the right way to do things'. (Bilal)

Taarab has existed in a society that has undergone a complete transformation from a small settlement to an urban environment in less than a century, and it is still changing (Simpson & Kresse, 2008; Chaudhuri, 1985; McPherson, 1998; Kearney, 2004). In contemporary Zanzibar there are more players in motion than ever. Participating in and forming the daily life of the city, there are Zanzibari MPs (Members of Parliament), Tanzanian MPs, quite a few expatriates uninvolved in Zanzibari daily life but involved in their businesses and neighbourhoods, and countless businessmen and businesswomen of different nationalities, be it Indian, Chinese, American, Italian, Omani, Saudi-Arabian, Egyptian, Norwegian, South African or Zanzibari. These countries represent some of the nationalities that are involved in the several aspects of tourism, large-scale entrepreneur activities such as the numerous small businesses in Stone Town, the Zanzibari industry, the export and import as well as a slow buyout of plots throughout the island. It seems plausible that all these factors have an impact on a relatively small island, an even smaller capitol and its inhabitants. What informs the Zanzibari society as a whole, also affects the musical life in the archipelago. The musicians based in Stone Town are among the first to feel the changes. There are several developmental processes in the contemporary environment due to the snowballing tourism, and, perhaps, with it the growing commercialism in the city. DCMA is an important player in the musical climate, seeing as it is one of the accredited educational institutions. How the board of the music academy chooses to interact with the community as well as the students and their teachers, set the table for future musicians in Stone Town.

The informants advocate the important role DCMA holds in the education of young musicians. They diverge, however, on how the music academy best can perform its part. There is a change in the commercial forces as the archipelago now depends more on the tourism industry than the traditional spice trade they have benefited from the last centuries (Middleton, 1992; Toussaint, 1961).

As the main market for taarab now moves towards the hotels (Madsen, D., 2007:46), where space is too little to hold the whole orchestra, the nature of the taarab concerts changes. The hotel owners, Indian or Zanzibari, American or European, are not interested in employing the entire orchestra to perform during the hotels' cocktail hours. For them, the much more favourable solution is to employ only a small group to perform, since they take up less space and may be paid less. The arrangers of *Sauti za Busara* music festival, Busara Promotions and DCMA often act as mediators between small groups of musicians and the hotels. Even when it is announced that one of the big orchestra is playing, the actual group seldom consists of more than ten musicians. During these regular performances there may sometimes be even fewer musicians as well. As the tourists are unable to understand the meaning of the lyrics, the choir is normally reduced to one or two singers. Sometimes the musicians play a whole evening with instrumental numbers only. During these performances, some of the members have to stay behind. Zainab is one of those who are not included, as the older accordionist Saidi is more experienced and holds a higher internal rank in the orchestra. Matona usually performs with one of the many smaller groups he is the leader of, and has innumerable assignments.

Madsen (2007) explores the development on the contemporary taarab scene further and states that there are differences in pay as well as availability in jobs between groups of musicians affiliated with DCMA and "independent" groups. Moreover, several teachers at the music academy have joined with friends and colleagues to form groups that target the tourist market with what are called "a genuine Swahili experience" or "Swahili flavours" in flyers distributed in Stone Town. It might therefore seem that DCMA is playing a crucial role in connecting musicians with the newly found tourist market in Stone Town. The academy contributes both to supply the musicians with work but also to promote new forms of taarab music made fit for the demand of contemporary Stone Town. Moreover, the academy and its collaborators have decided to document as much of the taarab music as possible, by means of recording and notation. DCMA may therefore be seen as an intermediary between the commercial market and the traditional taarab scene in Stone Town with its orchestra. However, the academy promotes only those musicians who are interested in paid work as professionals by playing 'chamber taarab' (Madsen, D., 2007:52) and not the two main larger-sized orchestra.

Khamis (2002:3) writes that "commercialism may also mean stringent competition, which is not necessarily a good thing, since it may result of the confusion of

mediocrity for excellence”. Whether the taarab scene of Stone Town has moved towards this stringent competition, is still unclear or too early to say. One possible interpretation of technical excellence traded for mediocrity, is one shared by most taarab musicians in Stone Town. Several musicians feel that the musical genre called ‘modern taarab’ is unworthy of being named taarab at all, as it is based on unauthorized reuse of already written taarab material with new and harsher lyrics. However, the opening of DCMA has caused the ideal taarab scene to resurge in an unforeseen way. Kirkegaard (1996) argued in her dissertation that the Egyptian instruments qanun and oud would be overrun by the synthesizer, and that few, if any, would know how to play them. Fortunately, this has not yet happened in Stone Town. Even though synthesizers and Western pop music have heavily influenced ideal and modern taarab in the last years, there are still musicians dedicated to the performance of ideal taarab only. Most of the contemporary musicians who perform ideal taarab have connections with DCMA. Thus, DCMA and Busara Promotions can take some of the credit for the maintenance of ideal taarab as a musical genre and cultural expression. Ideal taarab has changed somewhat through the years, as all musical styles evolve and develop. All the same, connoisseurs and ordinary listeners alike easily recognise the style when they hear it played in its contemporary form. There are still several ideal taarab songs left to be performed and recorded in contemporary Stone Town. As a Zanzibari friend put it: “I still think some of the most beautiful taarab songs are still out there; they have not yet been recorded”.

6.3 Participating on the contemporary musical scene

Those who have two garments do not wear one only.
Zanzibari proverb.¹¹⁸

The musicians on the contemporary taarab scene have to be able to switch between different musical contexts in order to survive as professionals. It is common practice to juggle taarab rehearsals in one of the two big orchestra with extensive travelling, in order to perform in various tourist venues in the same day. Additionally, in the course of a week in the high season, the same musicians find themselves doing several jobs at the same time: They teach at DCMA, play on representation trips to the Tanzanian mainland or nearby destinations, rehearse with several groups and bands, and partake in numerous recording projects with different styled music.

During the festivals musicians perform with several groups, wearing long white robes and *kofia* (flat, cylindrical hat worn by Zanzibari men) one day, and jeans and shirts the next. When I was performing with one of the largest taarab orchestra in Sauti za Busara in February 2009¹¹⁹, the musicians wore short-sleeved overalls with patterns of Arabic, Indian and African origin and trousers. The women in the choir wore their usual flamboyant dresses with matching headscarves, shawls, shoes and lipstick. The effect of the manifold clothing was quite pleasant and matched the complexity of the music and the lead singer's exuberant improvisation, as well as the animated response of the audience. Old style ideal taarab concerts leave a smile on the face of the audience, as the musicians and singers alternate between musical and lyrical expressions of joy and

¹¹⁸ Crystal, 2006:174.

¹¹⁹ www.busaramusic.com/festivals/2009/index.php.

sorrow, anger and tenderness.¹²⁰ The lyrics may describe poetic and emotional love one moment, only to flash with righteous indignation over unfair social conditions the next. The music mirrors the lyrics, and it is occasionally interrupted by long instrumental sequences and solos.

The audience may respond to the taarab with dancing in front of the stage. In their hands they have money, which they display in air before leaving the bills with the singer. This tipping, called *ku tunza*, usually symbolizes the audience's agreement or pleasure with what is being sung onstage; normally a harmless way to express admiration for the singer's ability or the song itself. They respond primarily to the lyrics of a song, and the timing of the tipping is vital to the interpretation of the act.¹²¹ However, this tipping has been known to cause turmoil in the Stone Town community, something I experienced during a taarab rehearsal several years ago in my field notes:

The orchestra was performing a song that discussed the public concern that a certain (fictional) woman was behaving in an unrespectable manner. As the lead singer went into an elaborate improvisation, one of the women in the audience rose and deliberately danced towards the stage with a large bill in her hand. She attached the money to the singer's collar at the exact moment when he described how the behaviour of the woman in the song was condemned by the unfaithful neighbour's wife, and solemnly glided back to her seat. No reaction was shown by the audience except for several long and meaningful glances towards a small woman sitting very still on the third row. This was an event where women made up the entire audience and the only men present were musicians. No one was wearing the *buibui* and all of us could see how the appointed woman's neck darkened with embarrassment and humiliation.

The dancing woman thus used the taarab concert as a way of letting her neighbour know that she was aware of her husband's infidelity and that she was unafraid to admit it. Without uttering a single word, she made the entire women's community aware of a private and touchy marital matter. *Ku tunza* used in this way is a rare thing. With the changing audiences and the development of *mpasho*¹²² and modern taarab, the atmosphere of the concerts is changing and moving towards harsher lyrics under the influence of Western hip-hop.¹²³

The contemporary taarab concerts are open to both men and women and the direct wordless communication through tipping is not as frequent. However, long traditions with taarab concerts as a social venue and communicational tool as well as a musical gathering have left their mark on the behavioural patterns of the audience. Taarab is a form of expression, coming into existence in the interaction between performers and audience. It is more than technical skills, scales, lyrics and melodies. The importance of the music in Zanzibari society is shown in the fact that several political

¹²⁰ Taarab concerts from different eras have been further described by Racy, 2003; Danielson, 1997.

¹²¹ M. Ilyas, personal communication, February 10, 2009.

¹²² Topp Fargion (2000); cf. 3.0 *THEORETICAL BACKGROUND* and 5.1 *The family*.

¹²³ R. Armstrong, personal communication, January 14, 2009.

governments have made attempts to use taarab as a means of communicating political messages (Graebner, 2004). The first president of the United Republic of Tanzania viewed taarab's ties with the Arab middle class of the day as so unwanted that he implemented several prohibitions against the long-established music. To control taarab was to control public opinion, as was demonstrated by Siti binti Saad in the 1930s when she severely criticised the courts and higher classes (see Fair, 2001). Taarab thus has long traditions as not only a unifying Zanzibari musical style but also a social arena. In my opinion it is possible to talk about taarab not only as 'taarab music' but as an act of 'taarab-ing' as well. In the performance lies a social interaction between the audience and the orchestra. Simon Frith (1987) writes on pop music that it is "an experience of placing: in responding to a song, we are drawn, haphazardly, into affective and emotional alliances with the performers and with the performers' other fans." Taarab is popular music, and pop music evolves.¹²⁴ Communication takes place through music within the audience as well as within the orchestra and the choir. The hierarchy of the orchestra and its codes of behaviour contribute to the social and musical interplay. Opinions can be voiced through lyrics as well as through the act of tipping. The informants generally downplay the role of contextualization, seeing as their focus is on the specific traits of the situation for performers as well as traits and characteristics of the music itself; its artistic qualities, so to speak.

Considering the social aspects of taarab and its potential to form public opinion shown throughout history, it is alarming that so much of the market for ideal taarab has moved towards a tourist audience that does not understand the music. With its subtle lyrics and rich melodies, taarab has been a cultural expression of a unique heritage.

The large taarab orchestra earlier arranged at least two major concerts a year, to which they composed and rehearsed new material. On the contemporary scene, there are now more modern taarab concerts than ideal taarab concerts. During the latter, remixes of old melodies are played on synthesizers. The remix appeals particularly to the younger audience. As Kirkegaard predicted in 1996, there is a growing gap between the young musicians in contemporary Stone Town. However, the synthesizer has not completely taken charge over the taarab scene, in my opinion largely because of the emergence of DCMA. On the one hand, today there are musicians who intentionally seek to preserve the older musical tradition such as *ngoma*, *kidumbak*, *beni* and ideal taarab. These musicians are usually connected to DCMA in one way or the other. They perform a

¹²⁴ Cf. e.g. Frith, 1987.

varied repertoire of taarab and Western music, all within what they call the *Zenji*, Zanzibari twist. On the other hand, there are several young talented musicians and artists who employ their talents on the modern taarab scene, on music inspired by African mainland styles or the Zanzibari hip-hop, the 'Zenji flavour' (Adam, 2008).

The two groups of musicians generally have no trouble understanding one another, although their ideals are far apart musically. Several students at DCMA spend their nights dancing to the music they do not want to play during the day. It thus seems that the wing that aims for preserving older musical styles is able to coexist satisfactorily with the westerly influenced musical styles.

The concern is not primarily that the newer musical styles smother the older ideal taarab, although the topic is of concern to the latter circle. There is no danger that ideal taarab will disappear completely as long as DCMA is growing and improving and there still is a market for it on the main stages during festivals and in the numerous hotels throughout the islands. In my opinion, a more pressing challenge seems to be to communicate a commitment towards ideal taarab to young performers, and to take care that the music stays alive and continues to evolve without becoming merely an export commodity. Although it is interesting that the taarab orchestra are able to tour Europe, Asia and Africa with their performances, the informants have concerns that ideal taarab is in danger of stagnating at home. Roger Armstrong, an experienced record producer based in London, was the first to record the orchestra Nadi Ikhwani Safaa in 1988. When he returned to record another album again after 20 years, in 2008, he noted that taarab had undergone changes. Subsequent to the recording in 2008 and concerts in 2009, he noted the number of reactions he received where people expressed relief to hear taarab that was not "lazy".¹²⁵ The recording included several well-known songs from the last decades, namely *Watu Wananiuliza* and *Hakika Nakupenda*.¹²⁶ songs that have been performed for oblivious tourists in the hotels innumerable times. The recording allowed Zanzibari musicians to put much time and energy into contemporary ideal taarab songs, all composed in recent times. This is opposed to their every day realities, where they generally either perform "audience friendly" music in the hotels or reinterpret the old classics. After the recording project was completed, Armstrong noted that several musicians had been inspired to once again compose new ideal taarab songs. They also seemed to perform with more energy onstage.

¹²⁵ R. Armstrong, personal communication January 14, 2009.

¹²⁶ *Watu Wananiuliza* translates 'people are saying', whereas *Hakika Nakupenda* means 'it is true, I love you' (my translation).

Khamis (2004b:35) writes on the current situation of taarab:

Taarab has therefore, an unlimited scope for change determined by ‘utility impetus’ and ‘flavour(s)’ of its audience(s). In a situation in which everything has turned into potential ‘commodity’, taarab too has turned into a ‘commodity’ – hence its existence is inherently functional and audience-oriented. As a result, stable and essentialist identities formally represented by this art-complex, are fragmented as the probing and cautious progression towards innovation and excellence is played down as moral, social and cultural taboos are broken and societal well-being is decried as the empowerment of a clique and their vested interests are safe-guarded.

Contemporary taarab and its performers are influenced by other cultures and societies, but not necessarily in such a way that the music ultimately will lose its unique character and function in Stone Town society. When the Zanzibari audience listens to ideal taarab on the contemporary musical scene, they put into effect what Trondalen (2004) describes: The listeners perceive the perspective of time, cultural- and historical context through their own pre-understandings. This is consonant with Kirkegaard (2002:47), who writes that the interpretation of music may happen (and be perceived) in a number of ways; as “a piece of art, as a part of an overall cultural identity, or as an highly individual way of positioning oneself into societies and surroundings”. In my opinion an experience of ‘taarab-ing’ covers all the aspects mentioned above. Performers who hear a newly composed taarab song may quickly place the scales as a certain maqām, the rhythm as Indian and the lyrical stanza or metaphor as resembling an existing poem. As ‘taarab-ing’ in many ways is as much a social experience as a musical one, the inhabitants of Stone Town who have grown up with the music perceive the underlying significance of textual and musical choices in a way the Western listener is unable to.

Like urbanization is an important factor in cultural and musical development, change is an inevitable consequence of it. It may be argued that the urbanisation of Zanzibar commenced as early as 1840, when sultan Seyyid Said bin Sultan made Stone Town the seat of his Omani empire (Simpson & Kresse, 2008). However, one factor alone seldom leads directly to change, and influences leading to change contain elements reflected on several levels of a society. Larsen (2008:ix) writes that the capital of Zanzibar should be thought of not so much as a cultural entity, but more as “a bounded set” of overlapping discourses. She argues that the city consists of “a plurality of voices orchestrated by common themes, idioms and meanings, resonant with the participation of others in the past as well as here and now” (Loc.cit.). Stone Town seems to be an ever-changing society, absorbing the changes taking place around and inside with surprising flexibility. Few researchers have come to conclusions as to how a musical style is directly influenced by the increasing urbanization of African societies (Nettl, 2005). Nevertheless,

it is indisputable that there are changes taking place. The informants, disagreeing on topics such as women's challenges in performing music and musical ideals for the style 'ideal taarab' all agree that the music is facing great changes. The orchestra's repertoire choices are to a greater extent influenced by external factors. The increasing touring possibilities leads to competition between groups, and the focus turn away from aims of merely employing the most talented musicians and performing the most. I repeat Racy's (2003:225) statement that "from one perspective, the music of tarab[sic.] seems curtailed and marginalized. From another, it appears well-rooted, timeless and increasingly internationalized".

I suggest that taarab holds a relatively timeless position in Stone Town society in that it has changed little compared to the society as a whole. Western pop music is increasingly popular and young musicians are unquestionably less inclined to spend hours as apprentices in a taarab orchestra. Said (2003:xx) writes in the preface to the 2003 edition of *Orientalism* that "reflection, debate, rational argument, moral principle based on a secular notion that human beings must create their own history" have been replaced by abstract ideas that "celebrate American or Western exceptionalism, denigrate the relevance of context, and regard other cultures with derisive contempt". Although the description is too extreme to illustrate the contemporary society in Stone Town, there is a distinct current of movement in Stone Town towards Western values, merchandise, language – and music.

Fortunately, there are also young musicians who have a desire to learn ideal taarab. These young musicians have the advantage of familiarity with several musical genres. This knowledge might equip them to deal with the increasing complexity of the contemporary musical scene. It will be interesting to note how these young musicians influence the future ideal taarab genre as well as the social context of 'taarab-ing'. It will also be significant to observe to what extent they will want to preserve what exist in its current state, or influence future compositions with genre-crossing elements of melody, rhythm and words. Whichever, taarab endures – although seemingly on a different course than before. The influences on taarab music are as varied and diverse as the music itself, combining and merging elements from several traditions into constantly changing musical genre. As taarab's surroundings change and evolve, the music continues to change and

evolve with them, seemingly increasingly internationalized.¹²⁷ In my opinion, the question is not whether taarab will survive but rather in what form it will continue to exist. I see the music as able to adapt to the changing society, the ability to adapt perhaps its one unchanging trait.

7.0 SUMMING UP

The focus of this thesis is the contemporary situation of performing (ideal) taarab in Stone Town. In order to explore the research questions I have interviewed two men and two women who are participants on the taarab scene in the city. Through their perceptions, I have attempted to understand and discuss the situation in view of relevant literature and my own experiences. The empirical material is described within five core categories (cf. chapter 5.0 above) and several sub-categories, and the material is further discussed within three main headings (cf. chapter 6.0 above).

I find evidence that the situation for performing taarab musicians in Stone Town has grown increasingly challenging in recent years, both in order to survive as musicians and to maintain respectability in Stone Town's society. A growing pressure from the outside world is the effect of growing tourism and 'the global village' coming closer through the Internet as well as increased travelling. The inhabitants of Stone Town have not been exempt from the strains of juggling the contemporary media reality and its ramifications: availability and knowledge about the outside world. This affects both male and female musicians. However, the changing realities seem to increase female instrumentalists' challenges of entry and existence on the taarab scene. Getting access and a continued foothold on the performing stage is strenuous for female instrumentalists. Women who want to take up an instrument have been encouraged to take up singing instead, or they have been left out of performances for various reasons. The resistance from established male instrumentalists (and on instances, Stone Town society in general) is described by all four informants and seems to be a result of the challenging conditions of professional musicians in general, *and* in deep-rooted traditions – both argued to have to do with women's place in society and the notion of what is regarded as respectable behaviour.

The underlying differences within Stone Town society and the contemporary taarab scene appear to be numerous. Since the growth of tourism commenced, there has

¹²⁷ Cf. Khamis, 2004a; Racy, 2003.

been a shift in paradigm in taarab, manifesting itself in the commercializing of the musical market for music in Stone Town. The generational gap is pronounced as regards both pedagogy of learning and teaching and the view of taarab as concept. DCMA plays a key role in the shift towards Western curricula, teaching and practice traditions and the professionalization of taarab music. Female musicians find themselves at the intersecting point between the Muslim society of Stone Town with its customs and practices, and Western influences and views. The position of religion in these questions calls for further exploration. There seems to be a constant negotiation and re-negotiation taking place within all layers of Stone Town society – (in)directly affecting taarab music. In my opinion, the gaps within the society are widening, seeing as traditional Muslim views are battling with Western ideas and commercial forces challenging conserving powers. At the moment it seems that commercial influences are gaining, the desire to make money outshining other concerns – as is often the case within new or young lines of business.

DCMA plays an important part in the ongoing processes in society. Wherever commercial powers are victorious in Zanzibar, tourism is growing and a new market for taarab is unfolding. The music academy has an influential voice on the contemporary cultural scene, and key personas are connected with the academy as well as with other major cultural actors in Stone Town (e.g. the music festival *Sauti za Busara*). As DCMA strengthens its role as a key player on the contemporary taarab scene, it seems that the influence of the traditional taarab orchestra diminishes proportionally. However this is perhaps to be expected as the academy is closer to the job market offered by the increasing tourism, and as several of the musicians in the orchestra also have close ties with DCMA.

Certainly, the experience of daily life in Stone Town has changed considerably since the archipelago was opened to tourism at the end of the last century. The personal as well as social identity of several Zanzibaris seems to be turning towards a more commercial understanding of values in both self and society.

The taarab genres are evolving. Conscious notice of factors affecting individuals' opportunities to take up and practice an instrument, e.g. the influence of family conditions and religious affiliation, must be taken in the days to come. Should the taarab scene stagnate and the only jobs available be within the 'chamber taarab' job market, a development towards taarab as a mere tourist attraction seems to be an inevitable consequence.

However it is encouraging to bear in mind that taarab has metamorphosed into new forms several times already and thus may possess the necessary strength to remain alive and evolving as a particular musical tradition.

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